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President Barack Obama wins Nobel Peace Prize

>> Back page



A woman holds on to a man as strong currents pull her away from the streets in Rosales town, northern Philippines, yesterday. Hundreds of people have been killed in the country's worst flooding in 40 years after back-to-back storms started pounding the country's north. (AP) Story on page 14

Ammunition seized at Freeport

ANNALIZA BORG

Eight containers carrying empty cartridges considered to be prohibited merchandise were seized at Malta Freeport yesterday.

The containers were seized after the German and American authorities informed the Maltese government on Thursday, that a ship was carrying the prohibited merchandise.

The Malta Independent has learnt that empty cartridges intended for military use were found in six of the containers.

Continues on page 12

From EU Windows 2001 to EU Windows 2009

NOEL GRIMA

Although there still remains the signing of the Lisbon Treaty by the President of Poland (reported to be planned for today) and that by the President of the Czech Republic, it seems that the Lisbon Treaty will become effective across the EU as from 1 January, 2010.

MEUSAC yesterday held a public conference at the Westin Dragonara not just to celebrate the Yes victory at the Irish referendum but also to ask what comes next.

There was a sense of a celebratory mood, and, especially towards the end of the conference, people kept mentioning Malta's sixth seat in the European

Parliament, as if this were the only result of the Irish vote.

Many glossed over the fact that the Irish only got it right at the second attempt, just as they had done on the Nice Treaty, and only after being beaten down by the worst recession in history and getting a raft of concessions; or that the French and the Dutch, who

had equally voted against the Constitution, had not been asked to take a second vote. No one even thought of mentioning those countries, such as Malta, where the Lisbon Treaty was ratified in Parliament without even a vote being physically taken.

Continues on page 2

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Approval of treaty opens way for next wave of enlargement

Continued from page 1

The Lisbon Treaty, however, includes more than just Malta's sixth seat at the EP. It will also lead to a loss of some of Malta's veto powers in the Council. Foreign Minister Tonio Borg said Malta had only used the veto once in these five years, on ship registration. Malta will still be able to use the veto on such issues as taxation, neutrality and foreign policy, but Malta, he pledged, will always be 'responsible'.

The European Parliament will be strengthened, which is to the benefit of the small nations who will not be so strong within the Council with its new qualified majority rules.

The treaty also states that a petition by over one million signatures from across the EU will be enough to force the Commission to reconsider an issue.

Dr Borg announced that at the next Budget, the national Parliament will be strengthened so that it can cope with the expected flow of proposals for EU legislation sent over for national scrutiny.

One other item in the treaty is the Fundamental Human Rights Charter which will now become basic law in the EU.

The approval of the treaty opens the way for the next wave of enlargement. Dr Borg said the government has always believed there should be no *numerus clausus* in the EU. Countries which satisfy the entry qualifications will be eligible for membership. This would include Turkey but even before that it could include Croatia and Iceland. Montenegro has already applied and, soon, so will



Photo: DOI (Saviour Cassar)

Serbia, while all opposition to Macedonia's inclusion seems to have died down.

Richard Crowe, an Irishman, legal adviser at the European Court of Auditors, gave a detailed presentation on what he called the upgrading of the EU from Windows 2001 to Windows 2009. He pointed at three still unresolved challenges: How will the President of the European Council, the High Representative and the Commission President relate to each other? How will the new Council voting system work in practice and whom will it benefit? Will the mechanisms to involve national parliaments prove to be effective?

It will only be after the system begins to operate that any eventual flaws can be identified.

In his presentation, Dr Borg referred to the equally lengthy and tortuous way in which the American states came together to create the Union: even there the process of integration worked slowly.

Dr Borg had left by the time the new American ambassador arrived, so he missed a masterful explanation of the US process. Douglas Kmiec, who made it clear he was speaking on a personal level, hinted the EU could say it was more fortunate. At the Philadelphia Convention in 1789, 55 people were locked together in a building in the height of summer and told they could not be let out unless they came up with a constitution.

Even so, the line between what was left to the individ-

ual states and what became the national government's area of competence, remained for many years a very thin and fragile line, a pliable border, even to this very day.

Mr Kmiec, being a law professor, concluded by asking a somewhat ambiguous question: does the EU Charter of Human Rights acknowledge a higher authority than itself?

He also made another equally cryptic remark when, in his official capacity as Ambassador, and after congratulating President Obama for winning the Nobel Peace Prize (he won the prize before he won the peace, he said), he referred to the closing down of the Guantanamo camp. The process now ongoing is that of sending the

inmates home, but in some cases their own countries do not want them back, Mr Kmiec said. Some countries in the EU are taking some of these: some openly declare it and some don't. To both, and without referring to Malta in particular, Mr Kmiec expressed his government's thanks.

Mr Kmiec also congratulated Malta for being an example to the US in the way it regulates its financial sector. Malta has shown, he said, that if you have standards of value and not merely insure against insurance, you can conduct economic activity in an ordinary way without thereby imperiling the world's economy and your own.

A panel of two MEPs, three MPs and the undersigned discussed how Malta's six seats in the EP could be utilised better, agreeing that the national Parliament needs further resources to be able to do its job of scrutinising the proposed EU legislation better.

Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, who concluded the conference, said that unless a person "who lives in St Catherine Street, Zurrieq" can understand what is going on, the EU and its processes will remain a mystery to many. With a sixth seat, the Maltese citizens are the most over-represented people in the EU. But when battling for this sixth seat, Malta was paving the way for Iceland as well, which has fewer inhabitants. Now that the internal restructuring of the EU is over, we can all turn to the issues that really matter - especially growth and a way out of the recession.

Somalis fight over khat

A 20-year-old Somali man was yesterday charged with attempted murder, after having allegedly stabbed another Somali, who is now fighting for his life.

Sakariye Alas Hassan pleaded not guilty to using a knife and forming part of a large group of people when he committed the offence.

The court, presided over by magistrate Jacqueline Padovani, was told that the case happened on Sunday evening, when two clans of Somalis, the Hawijja and the Izaaq, had a fight over a supply of khat, a plant used as a stimulant. Khat contains a number of chemicals, among which are two controlled substances, cathinone and cathine, but the plant itself is not illegal, particularly because, as its leaves mature or dry, cathinone is converted to cathine, which significantly reduces its stimulatory properties.

Meanwhile, another Somali involved in the fight, Mustaf Abdi Bihi, 24, was also brought before the court yesterday. He pleaded not guilty to seriously injuring one of his compatriots when he threw stones during the fight.

He was denied bail against a personal guarantee of €5,000. The 20-year-old, on the other hand, was remanded in custody.

Police inspectors Anthony Portelli and Carlos Cordina prosecuted. Lawyer Martin Fenech appeared for Mr Bihi, while lawyer Mark Busuttil appeared for Mr Hassan.

National boxing coach charged over record cannabis haul

Scott Dixon, who occupied the position of national boxing coach until last week, was yesterday brought before the court over the record 450-kilogram cannabis haul a month ago.

Apart from Mr Dixon, 33, a Scottish national, five other people are facing charges over the same case.

The court, presided over by magistrate Jacqueline Padovani, was told that Mr Dixon had been living in Malta for about four years, but never had a fixed address.

He pleaded not guilty to conspiring to deal in cannabis, trafficking and being in possession of the drug, and breaching the conditions of a pro-

bation order handed down last year, when he had been found guilty of possession of cocaine.

The 450 kilograms of cannabis discovered by the police on 8 September is valued at €1.5 million.

He was escorted to Malta from London on Wednesday night, after the Attorney General made a formal extradition request.

Mr Dixon occupied the position of national coach of the Malta Boxing Federation (MBF) until last week, but has since been suspended.

He was remanded in custody.

Police inspectors Dennis Theuma and Pierre Grech prosecuted. Lawyers Ian Farrugia and Michael Schirriha appeared for the accused.

Today's weather forecast

MAX 25°C MIN 18°C UV INDEX 5

GENERAL SITUATION: A ridge of high pressure extends from the Atlantic to the central Mediterranean as a weak trough of low pressure covers the eastern Mediterranean.

WEATHER: Sunny periods.

VISIBILITY: Good.

WIND: Light mainly westerly.

SEA: Slight.

SWELL: Negligible.

SEA TEMPERATURE: 25°C

