

**CONCLUDING ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE HON. CHRIS SAID, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC DIALOGUE AND INFORMATION, DURING THE EUROPE FOR CITIZENS 2007-2013 SEMINAR ORGANISED BY MEUSAC – SLIEMA - 29/10/2008**

Today we have met here because we believe in dialogue, debate and democracy. It is these three pillars that form the basis of Europe's Plan D project which is supported by the European Union's funding programme Europe for Citizens.

The Programme's priority areas are the promotion of participation and democracy at EU level; the future of the European Union and its values; intercultural dialogue; employment, social cohesion and sustainable development; and boosting awareness of the societal impact of EU policies.

This seminar has focused on Action 1, which, as we have already heard, consists of:

**(i) Town Twinning** - benefiting from the links established at local level between twinned municipalities for fostering exchanges and cooperation which seeks to encourage citizens to play a more active role both locally and at EU level.

**(ii) Citizens' Projects and support measures** - that explore innovative methods of citizens' participation

The European Commission supports actions to re-enforce European Integration and inter-cultural understanding and town-twinning is a very important tool to achieve these goals.

EU-funded gatherings share three common features: they show a commitment to EU integration; they build friendships in Europe; and they promote active participation.

Town twinning has long been an important mechanism for developing active European citizenship and a sense of shared identity. That is the reason why the new Europe for Citizens programme gives it a prominent position, expands its forms and activities, and allows it to develop its potential.

One major town twinning innovation in the 2007-2013 programme is the idea of thematic networking wherein Towns co-operate with their own twinning partners, as well as with the partners of their partners. This can help them explore a particular topic or theme, to share resources or interests, to gain influence or to face common challenges.

In this context, Action 1 supports thematic conferences and workshops involving at least three towns. These should serve as milestones for networking and should encourage the development of long-lasting, dynamic, multifaceted co-operation between twinned towns.

Action 1 will also provide support for citizens' projects which aim to empower Europeans from different countries to come together around common issues.

Both globalisation and the process of European integration mean that an increasing number of issues and concerns have become cross-national in nature, including migration, security, employment, the environment, multiculturalism, political representation, and more.

Through my experience as Mayor, I can confirm that this programme can be vastly beneficial. The aim of today's seminar is to disseminate information about the programme and convince those who have not yet benefited from it to realise the potential of Europe for Citizens.

It is very important for a country like Malta to participate fully in EU programmes and initiatives for two principal reasons. Participation 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.

#### **WHAT WE ARE DOING:**

Government understands the importance of twinning projects...we recently launched a revamped twinning policy through which we want to make sure that participants take the highest benefit possible.

We intend to establish a funding unit within MEUSAC which will not only disseminate information to Local Councils and NGO's but will also assist these entities in drawing up applications for project funding.

As Head of MEUSAC Dr Vanni Xuereb has pointed out we are already offering limited service within the existing structure and we are working towards expanding this to a full service in the coming weeks.

MEUSAC and the Local Councils have also finalized a draft Cooperation Agreement which will form the basis of the future working relationship between the two sides.

Government has also committed itself to reserve a call for Project Funding for Local Councils and NGO's while promising to create a fund through which we will help Local Councils fund the co-financing element of their approved projects.

This seminar is not the end of our commitment to help Local Councils and NGO's benefit more from EU Membership. On the contrary- it is the beginning. I hope that the information you gathered today serves as an impetus to make your best efforts to benefit more from EU funding.

The possibilities are there. We are here to help you. Success depends on your resourcefulness and endeavour.