

Draft EU legislation – keeping in mind the stakeholders

By Julian Micallef

The relatively large amount of EU legislative initiatives taking place yearly are very much witness to the complexity of this work-in-progress economic and political bloc. And although much has been attained in these past 50 years or so, a look at the policy strategies and the targets being set can attest that there is more to be done, even in the short term.

The European Commission has in recent weeks proposed legislation directly related with the financial crisis affecting our globalised world, the revision of migration policies so close to our attention, and is seeking to be proactive in relation to the energy and climate issues which have now been thrown at the forefront of our society's consciousness. And these among the more major initiatives – other more low-key legislation is proposed week in-week out. The decision-making process, governed according to the relevant articles of the Treaty, involves the Council of the European Union (composed of the governments of each Member State) and the European Parliament (consisting of the citizens' representatives) to varying degrees.

For an outsider, the EU legislative process may look quite lengthy and cumbersome. The toing and froing between the institutions, compromises and negotiation could perhaps prove too much for some. But when placed in its actual perspective - that this process affects 27 different States and 500 million citizens spread across the European continent – perhaps it could make quite some sense.

Given that legislation always has a targeted end means that stakeholders from particular sectors will always be interested. Whether it is a non-profit organisation, a business concern, or an interested individual there could be space to comment on future legislative proposals. The European Commission holds its own consultation exercise open to all. It occasionally also prepares Green Papers to introduce the theme and gather reactions and later on White Papers as the process progresses further.

There are other means at stakeholders' disposal. Businesses, for example, may participate in the European Business Test Panel and other initiatives that are currently being drawn up besides the numerous consultation exercises previously mentioned. All these take place prior to any actual proposal from the European Commission (the EU's administrative body). When actual proposals are made and passed on to the Parliament and the Council, there is also the possibility to monitor the progress being made by each dossier. But how can a stakeholder's voice be heard at these stages? With regard to Parliament, MEPs could be very willing to hear the citizen's voice, whether it is their constituent or not. Find-out missions are conducted, meetings made and reactions gathered which could ultimately be channeled into reports or parliamentary questions.

In the case of Member States, these may opt to involve their citizens too. On the local front, MEUSAC has been mandated with that function and so have been the line Ministries. This can be seen both during the process of adopting Malta's position vis-à-

vis Commission proposals and also in the introduction of EU law into national one. It is an essential function of public officials operating in an EU context to ensure that stakeholders are aware of pending legislative measures and involved at the earliest stages. It makes the process easier to implement later.

The Sectoral Committees being set-up within MEUSAC could be of assistance in that respect. It augurs well for more fruitful cooperation between government officials and civil society representatives.

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