

MALTA IN THE EU FIVE YEARS ON...

By Brenda Azzopardi

In 2004 the largest European Union enlargement ever took place, with the Union taking on another 10 new countries and increasing the number of member states to 25. As one of the newer member states, Malta is enjoying the full benefits of the Single Market, which was launched in 1993 and which has brought overall advantages to businesses, consumers and employees alike. Studies show that between 1993 and 2003, the Single Market's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was higher than it would have been had it not been in place. Other studies have also revealed that EU enlargement has helped both old and new EU Member States in the current world-wide economic recession and has proved to be 'an anchor of macroeconomic stability and democracy', amongst others.

EU employment has grown, intra-EU trade has increased, foreign direct investment has risen, and the millions of customs clearance documents formerly submitted every year no longer need to be completed. In fact, the EU has become a 'domestic market' for all European citizens. Following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and including the three European Economic Area countries - Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein - this amounts to 500 million consumers. Furthermore the EU has also made an effective difference to citizens' everyday lives where standards, workers' rights, children's safety, passenger mobility, public health and coping with disasters are concerned. Furthermore, as a result of Malta's membership in the EU, several projects were eligible for co-financing by the EU's Structural and Cohesion Funds.

In January 2008 Malta, along with Cyprus, joined the eurozone after thorough preparation for the changeover. Following a convergence plan agreed between Malta and the EU, Malta was in conformity with the Stability Pact's criteria by the end of 2006. Thanks to this major milestone in Malta-EU relations, many eurozone exchange costs have been scrapped. Maltese citizens now also find it much easier to compare prices across different European countries. The single currency encourages business confidence around Europe, and this in turn induces more trade and economic growth.

In December 2007, Malta lifted its sea and land borders to join the EU's borderless area, known as



Schengen. The Schengen Agreement was originally signed by five EU member States in 1985. In March 2008, the air borders were lifted.

On 12th June 2004, a few weeks after Malta became a member of the EU, the first ever EU Parliament elections were held here. A total of 27 candidates contested the five seats allocated to Malta in the European Parliament. Malta had a very high voter turnout of 82%. Another European Parliament election campaign is currently underway for the next round of elections which will be held this June. Since 1979, voter turnout in European elections has been following a downward trend. During this European Parliament communication campaign, the EU is doing its utmost to encourage people to be active European citizens and to become more aware of the importance of voting in these elections. The MEPs who represent us make an active contribution to shaping the future of Europe and by voting we can shape it the way we want.

Another event of great significance was Malta's ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, which was signed by all heads of States in December 2007, on 29th January 2008. Acceptance of the contents of this Treaty by the EU-27 will eventually give Malta a sixth seat in the European Parliament. ☺



**Malta-EU Steering
& Action Committee**

For further information
MEUSAC may be contacted by
email on info.meusac@gov.mt
or by calling on 2590 9101.