

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Information seminar organised by *Forum Malta fl-Ewropa* to discuss Malta's Rural Development Plan (2007-2013) and LEADER.**

A well-attended information seminar organised on the 27<sup>th</sup> November by *Forum Malta fl-Ewropa* and the Rural Development Department discussed the Rural Development Plan for Malta (2007–2013) and LEADER. LEADER is a Community initiative, widely recognised as having been a successful and innovative pilot instrument in the mobilisation of local actors in a bottom-up, territorial and integrated approach to pursue local development in rural areas

The main scope of this half-day seminar was to inform stakeholders and interested parties on the opportunities of financial assistance which will be available to them under the Rural Development Plan (RDP) and the LEADER initiative. Dr Gabriella Pace, Chief Executive, *Forum Malta fl-Ewropa*, explained that Malta's Rural Development Plan was submitted to the European Commission in September 2007. It is expected that the Plan will be approved by the first quarter of 2008. With regard to LEADER, Dr Pace explained that Community initiative has been a successful and innovative instrument in

the mobilisation of local actors in a bottom-up, territorial and integrated approach to pursue local development in rural areas. She added that LEADER projects have to be managed by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which are to develop a Local Development Strategy (LDS) for the improvement of the selected rural territory and can identify projects falling under Axis 1 and 3 of the RDP.

Tony Meli, Director - Rural Development Department (RDD), outlined the main objectives of the Rural Development Plan for Malta (2007– 2013). The Strategy emphasizes improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector through support for restructuring; enhancing the environment and the countryside through support for land management; and enhancing the quality of life in rural areas and promoting diversification of economic activities.

The proposed Strategy includes two measures relating to farmers' participation in food quality schemes and information and promotion activities on food quality schemes, which have been allocated €1.2m and €670,000 respectively. Limited cooperation between beneficiaries for partnerships with no farmers cooperatives and associations applying for aid was also noted and the types of projects applied for were largely marked by scarce innovation. In fact, Axis 4 of the Rural Development Programme, through LEADER, builds on an approach to maximise cooperation.

The role of cooperation and the Local Action Groups was explained in further detail by Michelle Borg, Economics Officer (RDD). LAGs have been allocated €3.9m for the administration of projects during the current programming period. Projects realised may range from the setting of trails to the linking of sites of tourist value, small-scale recreational amenities and the organization of events or shorter attractions. Also of relevance is the fact that these LAGs should be composed of representatives from local councils, Government and other State entities, the business sector and voluntary organizations.

In his presentation, Ivan Farrugia explained that LEADER can be resorted to in order to carry out projects relating to heritage and culture such as the development of trails,

conservation and rehabilitation of rural areas which may include projects for the restoration and rehabilitation of windmills, tourism, education, landscaping, networking, the promotion of local products, and projects directed towards youth and women.

In his closing address, the Hon. Dr Frans Agius said that LEADER has been implemented successfully in other EU Member States and has been recognised as an innovative means through which various initiatives targeting the development and embellishment of rural areas have been realised. Hon Agius stated the Rural Development Strategy for Malta 2007 – 2013 is in the process of being approved by the European Commission and the Strategy will be implemented as of next year.

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