

# Assistance to civil society organisations through special fund

Chris Said, Parliamentary Secretary for Public Dialogue and Information, on Tuesday presented cheques to beneficiaries of the Civil Society Fund (CSF), which is administered by the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee (MEUSAC).

The fund aims at assisting constituted bodies and representative organisations to keep abreast of developments in the European Union, and enabling them to better educate their members about EU matters related to their respective fields of competence and to participate effectively in the decision-making process at European level.

For 2008, the financial assistance provided by the government through the CSF consisted in a refund covering part of the expenses actually incurred by these organisations throughout 2008 in relation to these objectives.

When addressing participants at the CSF distribution ceremony, MEUSAC head Vanni Xuereb explained MEUSAC's objectives following its reactivation and the subsequent absorption of *Forum Malta*



Chris Said, Parliamentary Secretary for Public Dialogue and Information (right) presenting cheques to beneficiary organisations of the MEUSAC Civil Society Fund in respect of EU related initiatives held during 2008

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*fl-Ewropa* in July 2008. The CSF had previously been administered by the FME and following the re-activation of MEUSAC it was decided to utilise the outstanding balance of the CSF. Dr Xuereb said that

MEUSAC aims at empowering civil society organisations to make the best of the many and various opportunities provided by EU membership.

Dr Said said that the process to financially assist

constituted bodies and civil society organisations prior to Malta's EU accession will continue in a different format this year. In fact, the CSF, which initially provided assistance to the constituted bodies and civil society

organisations to familiarise themselves with the EU's institutions and policies prior to Malta's accession to the EU, will as from this year be re-designed as a Co-financing Fund for non-governmental organisations, in parallel with the fund provided for in the 2009 Budget for EU Funded Projects in Localities. Both funds will assist NGOs and local councils respectively in terms of the co-financing element of EU Funded Projects.

Twenty-seven organisations have this year benefited from the 2008 Civil Society Fund. The Parliamentary Secretary encouraged participants to be pro-active not only with regard to EU funding but also with regard to their active involvement in the consultation process which the government has embarked on, both through MEUSAC and MCESD. He stated that as of this year both MEUSAC and MCESD will be housed in the same centrally-located building in Valletta to maximise accessibility to the public and to CSOs as well as to further synergise the consultation processes on EU related issues and on domestic issues respectively.

## University of Malta PhD Student awarded prestigious fellowships

Joseph Borg B.Sc., M.Sc., has been awarded academic fellowships by the Human Genome Organisation (HUGO) and by the European Molecular Biology Organisation (EMBO).

He is a graduate student reading for the Ph.D. degree under the academic supervision of Professor Alex E. Felice in the Laboratory of Molecular Genetics of the University of Malta (Medicine; Physiology and Biochemistry) and the Mater Dei Hospital (Pathology; Genetics). The research is partly supported by a graduate fellowship from the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme.

Earlier in the year, Mr Borg was given support of the ITHANET network to present the group's work at the annual meeting of the European Society of Human Genetics in Barcelona, Spain and at the International Thalassaemia Meeting in Singapore.

The HUGO fellowship served for Mr Borg to participate in the 6th Mutation Detection Training Course with other young graduate students from across Europe and to make a short presentation entitled "Identification of Globin Gene regulators Using a Whole genome Analysis Approach". The EMBO fellowship permits Mr Borg to visit the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, Holland to conduct experimental studies about the biochemical mechanisms that control globin gene expression in normal development and in disease such as thalassaemia.

The research on haemoglobin genetics and thalassaemia, led by Professor Felice is a continuation of a tradition at the University of Malta that has had research interests in haemoglobin since the time of Professor Frank Vella in the 1960s, Professor Maurice Cauchi, the late Dr Joseph. L. Grech and Professor William H. Bannister. It concerns fundamental mechanisms on gene control that may be meaningful in diabetes and other common diseases in Malta or to regenerate adult blood cells suitable for transplantation.

## Mass to inaugurate pastoral visits

Archbishop Mgr Paul Cremona OP this afternoon at six will be celebrating Mass with parish priests at the Cathedral Church in Mdina, initiating his pastoral visitation to the parishes, on the theme of the archdiocese's pastoral plan for 2009-11.

Through the visitation, Mgr Cremona will take a close look at the realities of the archdiocese, particularly the building of the community, the catechesis, the liturgy, the ministry of the deacon, the family, adolescents and young people.

The first 15 parishes of the 70 in Malta where

the visitation will be made are Attard (10-16 January); Balzan (24-30 January); Valletta, St Dominic (31 January-7 February); Iklin (15-20 February); Gzira (21-27 February); Ta' Xbiex (1-6 March); Floriana (7-12 March); Valletta, St Augustine (15-21 March); Lija (21-30 March); Valletta, St Paul (19-25 April); Msida (9-20 May); Luqa (22-29 May); Paola, Our Lady of Lourdes (3-12 June), Paola, Christ the King (28 June-4 July); Sta Lucija (22 July-5 August).

Mgr Cremona is expected to visit 26 parishes this year. The pastoral visitations will continue until 2011.

## Mepa decides 277 cases in December

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa) in December decided 277 applications and received 558 new applications. The net pending caseload at the end of the month was 4,620. Last month, the authority also processed 55 notifications of development, which, according to the Development Notification Order 2007, do not require a formal application.

During the month Mepa issued 16 contraventions to developers on sites that were breaching construction site management regulations.

These fines amounted to a total of €20,032.47. Inspectors also issued a total of 25 other contraventions, amounting to €1,455.75, to individuals who were found breaching the Littering Act. Sixty-five Stop and

Enforcement notices were issued, 55 in Malta and 10 in Gozo.

The enforcement section within Mepa closed 36 cases, 30 in Malta and six in Gozo.

15 other enforcement cases were sanctioned by a planning permit while another 21 cases were resolved by the owners' decision to remove their illegal development and comply with the enforcement notice.