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#EU2017MT: Malta's Permanent and Deputy Permanent Representatives to the EU interviewed

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Minister Helena Dalli presents Maltese Presidency priorities to EP



Malta Summit - February 3

EU leaders support Maltese Presidency's efforts to take forward all elements of EU's comprehensive migration policy



"We want to engage with the US but we cannot stay silent when principles are being trampled on," Prime Minister Joseph Muscat said in a joint press briefing he delivered with European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker following the first round of talks of the EU28 during the informal Summit held in Malta.

"During lunchtime we had an open discussion on transatlantic partnerships," Dr Muscat said, pointing out that "the biggest concern among EU leaders is some of the decisions being taken and attitudes adopted by the US administration".

On February 3, the EU28 participated in a morning working session which discussed migration. The afternoon session took place without UK Prime Minister Theresa May and discussed the

future of the EU and preparations to the celebrations tied to the 60th Anniversary of the Rome Treaty.

Migration

President Tusk said that the EU28 had agreed on operational measures for Libya to fight people smugglers and help stranded migrants and to work closely with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

"We finally have a legal partner in Libya which will help us prepare some steps to support the authorities in Libya," Mr Tusk highlighted.

Prime Minister Muscat said that the EU28 sent a message that one can tackle migration from a level-headed point of view. He said that it was agreed that assistance to the UN-backed Libyan government will be given to help manage the camps for refugees which are in a "dire" situation.

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MEUSAC Head & journalists in Q&A session with Brussels-based journalists

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MEUSAC Head Vanni Xuereb, Migrant Report chief editor Mark Micallef and Mediatoday managing editor Saviour Balzan, participated in a question and answer session at Europe House in Valletta.

The event, organised by MEUSAC, which coincided with the official start of the 2017 Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU on January 11, saw a number of international journalists based in Brussels from various media organisations ask questions to Dr Xuereb, Mr Micallef and Mr Balzan. The journalists were in Malta accompanying the College of Commissioners during their visit for the launch of the Maltese Presidency, as is custom at the start of every presidency.

The event started off with an overview by Dr Xuereb about

Malta and the EU. He also spoke of MEUSAC's role in bringing the EU closer to Maltese citizens.

Dr Xuereb explained that Malta's support for the EU has remained strong. He said that amid the doom and gloom scenario in Europe, the 2016 Autumn Eurobarometer survey found that 82% of Europeans living in Malta feel they are EU citizens. The EU average is 67%.

"When compared to the rest of the Member States (EU28), public opinion on the EU in Malta is on the high side," he highlighted.



Newly elected President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani (second from left), who was in Malta to participate in a working dinner with Prime Minister Joseph Muscat, European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker a day before the informal summit, had an informal meeting with representatives of civil society. The meeting, hosted by the European Parliament Information Office, was held at Europe House. MEUSAC Head Vanni Xuereb, Mandy Falzon, Head EU Funding and Joe Sciberras, Manager Communications and Events, had a brief exchange with President Tajani and explained MEUSAC's role in bringing the EU closer to citizens.

Down Syndrome Association benefits from €32,000 in EU funds through MEUSAC assistance

MEUSAC has helped the Association apply for two projects under Erasmus+. One of our executives met MARTHESE MUGLIETTE, Radio Valo Leader, to discuss their upcoming project, 'Building Relationships and Learning Together'.

What are your organisation's objectives?

Our aim is to support parents of newborns diagnosed with Down Syndrome and to work on issues directly related to our members.

In your opinion, how does EU funding help NGOs like yours implement ideas?

We are a voluntary organisation and we wouldn't ever be able to provide opportunities such as youth exchanges to our members were it not for EU funding.

You applied for a youth exchange under Erasmus+ Programme. What will the project 'Building Relationships and Learning Together' entail?

A group of youths with an intellectual disability from Malta, Germany and Finland, accompanied by their leaders, will meet in Gozo in May. The project is aimed at enabling participants to appreciate the different cultures of their country of origin and acquire basic life-skills in health and safety as well as to help improve their communication skills. The group will be spending a week in Gozo and are expected to participate

in a number of activities related to culture, folklore and traditional crafts.

What benefits does this opportunity bring to the organisation and its members?

Our members will get the opportunity to participate in youth exchanges, make new friends and get to know different cultures and people. The association also benefits from such opportunities as it continues to inform itself about what is happening in other countries vis-a-vis the Down Syndrome condition and be in a better position to work on the already existing good practices one can find overseas and which are still lacking here in Malta. Following such an exchange, organisations can help each other resolve any issues that may exist in any of the participating countries.

How did MEUSAC assist you throughout the application process for these projects?

One of the drawbacks of being a voluntary organisation and working on a voluntary basis is that our time is limited. Therefore, although there is so much to do, there are few people to do it on a voluntary basis. Applying for such projects is no walk in the



park and if it weren't for MEUSAC's assistance, we would have never even tried submitting an application.

What actions should the EU consider to help improve the lives of persons with Down Syndrome?

In our opinion, the EU should make sure that the UN Convention

on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is being fully implemented by all countries that have adhered to the Convention. The EU should always verify any information it receives from its Member States by directly communicating with the NGOs involved in the field.

Minister Dalli addresses attachés on data protection and privacy

Attachés dealing with issues of data protection and data privacy from the 28 EU Member States were in Malta for the Working Party on Information Exchange and Data Protection (DAPIX) meeting.



Photo - DOI - Jeremy Wonnacott

Addressing participants, Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties Helena Dalli stated that the Maltese Presidency supports all efforts at safeguarding the right of all individuals to the protection of personal data at European and international levels. In this regard, Dr Dalli stated that the Maltese Presidency will work to promote and enhance cooperation with the Council of Europe to conclude a modernised Convention for the protection of individuals with regards to the automatic processing of personal data.

"It is our duty and moral obligation as administrators and policy makers to create an ethical framework where personal data can be processed securely, transmitting a fair and safe environment in which we can interact," Minister Dalli said.

Dr Dalli stressed the need for the creation of a right balance between data usage restrictions and data transfer according to ethical and legal purposes. This will encourage more people to use the resources, right knowledge and new opportunities prevalent within this legal working framework.



The Maltese Presidency unveiled an artistic project called "Ilma u Melh" (Water and Salt) in the Atrium of the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels. Inaugurated by the Deputy Prime Minister Louis Grech, in the presence of Parliamentary Secretary Ian Borg, this project is part of a tradition whereby the incumbent Presidency decorates the building

which houses the Council of the EU with various exhibitions and installations. Ilma u Melh entails a series of installations, conceptualised, designed and commissioned by Dr Antoine Zammit, Architect Monica Audrey Galea and their team from the Faculty of Architecture and Built Environment at the University of Malta.

Editorial

After Malta, what next?



Vanni Xuereb

My colleague Kurt Formosa and I recently had the opportunity to have an informal and rather lengthy chat with David Jones, the United Kingdom's Minister of State at the Department for Exiting the European Union. Minister Jones was in Malta to participate in the informal meeting of Ministers and State Secretaries responsible for EU Affairs. He was interested to hear from us how 'Brexit' is being perceived in Malta and what the most important concerns of the Maltese people are in relation to the withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

A few days before the Malta summit, I was interviewed by the BBC. The reporter asked me a few questions relating to Malta and the EU, the future of the EU

as well as on Malta-UK relations. As Prime Minister Joseph Muscat stated to the European Parliament on January 18, "It is quite a historic irony for a country that has been a British colony for two centuries, and which currently also presides the Commonwealth, to hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union at the time of the triggering of the process by means of which the United Kingdom will, unfortunately, cease being a member of the European Union which it supported us to join".

Besides serving as an opportunity for the leaders of the 28 Member States to agree on so-called 'Malta Declaration' on the external aspects of migration, which focused on addressing the Central

Mediterranean route, the informal summit also provided leaders of the 27 with an opportunity to resume their political reflection on the future of the EU with 27 member states, launched immediately after the UK voted on June 23, 2016 to leave the European Union and continued in Bratislava in September.

Writing to the 27 heads of state or government ahead of the summit, European Council President Donald Tusk identified three main threats, dangerous for the stability of Europe. These include: the new geopolitical situation - China, Russia, the Middle East and Africa as well as the new American administration that "all make our future highly unpredictable"; the internal situation - a rise of the nationalist, increasingly

xenophobic sentiment in the EU itself; and the state of mind of the pro-European elites - decline of faith in political integration, submission to populist arguments and doubt in the fundamental values of liberal democracy.

One looks forward to the celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Rome Treaties on March 25 as an opportunity to rejuvenate a project that, though certainly not flawless, has delivered on its two main goals: peace and the economic and social well-being of the peoples of Europe.

Stakeholders' dialogue on unjustified 'geoblocking' in the EU

MEUSAC participated in a dialogue on January 20 organised by the Maltese Business Bureau (MBB) and the European Parliament Information Office in Malta.

The dialogue was moderated by MBB chief executive Joe Tanti. Dr Greta Agius, Competitiveness Attaché at Malta's Permanent Representation to the EU and MEP Therese Commodini Cachia (EPP-PN) also intervened.

On May 26, 2016, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Regulation on Geo-blocking and other forms of discrimination based on customers' nationality, place of residence or place of establishment within the internal market. The overall objective of the proposal is to give customers better access to goods and services in the Single Market, aimed at preventing direct and indirect discrimination based on the customer's nationality, place of residence or place of establishment in cross-border commercial transactions between traders and customers in the EU.

Dr Commodini Cachia, who is the rapporteur on the Copyright Directive for the European Parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs, stressed that any legislative

intervention should remain proportionate and should not oblige SMEs to sell in other Member States.

"The Council is not asking traders to deliver goods to countries they don't want to deliver to but at least should give access to all consumers in all Member States to purchase goods, since such goods may still be collected by an individual on their behalf," she added.

On different prices of goods and services for consumers who are not in the location of certain traders, it emerged that the Council is asking that traders should not be banned from offering different prices for their goods and services but that the prices should neither be based on the consumer's nationality.

A representative of the Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry, whilst welcoming the report on geoblocking prepared by the EP's Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO), warned that certain rules could push traders away from the online market. He also requested a clarification on after-sales services, more specifically on whether traders would have to offer such services to consumers from countries the traders are not targeting.



An E-commerce Europe barometer recently revealed that two in three cross-border shopping attempts in the EU fail due to restrictions or re-routing of customers based on discrimination

on grounds of nationality or residence. On the business side Commission findings reveal that while 65% of consumers purchase online, only 16% of SMEs sell online and only 7.5% of SMEs sell online across borders.



MEUSAC Head interviewed by BBC

MEUSAC Head Vanni Xuereb was interviewed by BBC journalist Kevin Connolly prior to the Malta Informal Summit held on February 3. The feature was aired on BBC World. Dr Xuereb spoke of the ties between Malta, the EU and the United Kingdom stressing the importance of the friendship between Malta and the UK even for future relations with the EU once the UK leaves the Union.

Migration: Valletta Action Plan implementation to be assessed, identify bottle necks

Malta's Permanent Representative to the EU Marlene Bonnici on her experience so far since Malta assumed the Presidency of the EU Council, on the root causes of migration and the dossiers which may be approved during the Presidency.

What has been your experience so far since Malta took over the Presidency?

So far it has been quite a positive experience. Preparations for the Presidency have been going on for around three-and-a-half years. The staff at the Permanent Representation has been working very hard.

We have prepared well for the presidency and although you can never prepare enough, the work we did in the last year and especially in the last months, is paying off. Feedback is also positive - both from the institutions as well as the Member States. We have also discovered a new side to the EU. I am pretty confident that Malta's Presidency will be successful.

What does a country gain by taking over the rotating Presidency of the Council?

All EU Member States are required to take over the Presidency for six months in rotation. The presidency not only gives us the chance to add our own flavour to the agenda, but also provides an excellent opportunity, especially for a country as small as ours, to gain a higher profile on the European and international scenes. This is also a period where Malta can reap the benefits of the exposure we get during the presidency. There are around 300 meetings taking place in Malta - including the informal summit of Heads of State and Government, which took place on February 3.

The role of the Presidency requires us to continuously negotiate with Member States and with the other institutions, in particular with the European Parliament. We also work closely with the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) as well as with the General Secretariat of the Council, the latter being our Secretariat for the period of the presidency. Therefore, while most of us know a lot of these people well, the

Presidency provides an additional opportunity for our teams to get to know the different institutions from a different angle. This experience is not only important for the period of the Presidency but also beyond it.

Which sectors falling under the council configurations within your remit do you predict will make significant progress in terms of getting dossiers approved?

We are working to make significant progress in a number of policy areas. We hope to achieve results on migration, particularly the external side but also working hard on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). On the external side, we want to try and focus, in particular, on the Central Mediterranean route which is very difficult. Regarding the CEAS, there are a number of legislative files on which we hope to achieve progress, including the EASO dossier, which is quite important as it will turn Malta-based EASO into a fully-fledged agency. Security is also an area where we are going to be ambitious. We are working hard on the entry/exit system and the proposal concerning the European Travel and Information System - which are both very complex but we are not shying away from the challenge.

There are then the dossiers that fall under ECOFIN that are also a priority for us. We expect political agreement on the Venture Capital and Entrepreneurship files (EUVECA & EUSEF) which are important in the context of access to finance for our companies. We are also hoping to conclude a number of financial services files, including the one on Securitisation.

The General Affairs Council will have the difficult task of preparing the normal meetings of the European Council but will also be the Council formation tasked with dealing with Brexit. We hope to be able to approve

the negotiating directives during our presidency. The Council will also adopt conclusions as a response to the European Commission's Communication entitled 'Next Steps for a Sustainable European Future: European Action for Sustainability'. The Communication is the Union's follow-up to the adoption by the United Nations of the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', a comprehensive plan of action meant to address all the dimensions of sustainable development namely, poverty eradication and the social, economic and environmental aspects of development. The Sustainable Development Goals will be mainstreamed into EU policies and initiatives.

The GAC is also responsible for EU enlargement and we hope to see one or two Inter-Governmental Conferences held with the candidate countries to open negotiations on further chapters. We should not forget trade. There are some exciting files coming up and on which we are working hard, including the trade agreement with Japan and the modernisation of the Customs Union with Turkey.

What kind of approach is needed to achieve a comprehensive and balanced approach that addresses the root causes of migration and forced displacement?

Malta is working on a comprehensive approach. We are putting a lot of work into the external dimension - working with partners and stakeholders to try and avoid further loss of life in the Mediterranean. We also believe that addressing the root causes of migration requires stronger engagement with our partners and that is why we hosted the summit on February 3. We are also following up on the 2015 Valletta Summit with a meeting of senior officials to look at the Valletta Action Plan, assess its implementation and identify bottle necks. Malta will also continue to support the good work of the European External Action Service



(EEAS) through the Partnership Framework which are already rendering results in a number of critical countries, including Niger.

On the other migratory routes, we will ensure that the Council continues to monitor the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement.

Moreover, the EU is putting measures in place, like, for instance, through the European Investment Bank (EIB). The Maltese Presidency will be working on the EIB's External Lending Mandate and the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) files, both aimed at facilitating and providing investment in neighbourhood countries to assist in their social and economic development.

At the same time, Malta has always advocated solidarity and continues to do so. Solidarity is one of the fundamental principles of the EU. We acknowledge that some countries have their own legitimate concerns, but it is also not sustainable to let front line Member States manage the migration burden alone. Therefore, we will continue to work on this matter to try and achieve a broad consensus on the main principles.

The migration phenomenon is very complex and multi-dimensional and we believe that we have to work on several tracks in parallel. We also believe that results on the external side will facilitate agreement on the more difficult internal files.

Mobile phone roaming charges to be abolished by June 15

Malta's Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU Neil Kerr on the legislative load the Presidency is faced with, on what's happening within the six Council formations he is responsible for, on the New Skills Agenda for Europe and on the much awaited removal of cell phone roaming charges.

What has been your experience so far in these first few weeks since Malta took over the Presidency?

We have now hit the ground running and I am very satisfied to say that the time I have invested in the units I am responsible for has paid off. Over the past months and years, I have gone to great lengths to ensure that the respective teams have the space they require to operate with a degree of autonomy and flexibility. Even though this might have been quite challenging in terms of abandoning the comfort zone they were used to operate in, I am very satisfied that they have risen to the occasion and

are in control of the process. This has also allowed me to focus on the 'big things' and to intervene on strategic matters, as required.

How is Malta being perceived in Brussels in terms of managing the presidency?

The feedback we received so far has been very positive and extremely encouraging. I have always insisted that we should not only be remembered for what we achieve, but more importantly, for the way we actually do so. The legislative load we are currently faced with has seen us engaging with all institutional actors from

day one and, in this respect, we have been very open and transparent in our negotiations.

Which sectors falling under the council configurations within your remit do you predict will make significant progress in terms of getting dossiers approved?

We consider ourselves very lucky in the sense that we have a very heavy legislative load to deal with. In terms of the legislative cycle, we find ourselves at the mid-point of the European Commission's term. Last year, the European Commission issued a substantial number of legislative proposals. This means that this year will be a very busy year for the co-legislators - Council and the European Parliament.

There is a lot happening within the six Council formations I am responsible for and, hence, we need to ensure that we keep up the momentum. The files related to the single market will be given priority



– keeping in mind that the latter is the European Union's largest asset. In this regard we will be investing heavily in files falling within the traditional internal market (goods and services) but also in those relating to the digital and energy single market. Moreover, it is important to point out that even though the spotlight will be mostly on the files where we shall be wrapping up negotiations with the European Parliament, a lot of ground will also be covered in terms of the new dossiers which have just been adopted by the European Commission such as the 2030 climate and energy framework, the follow-up to the Paris Agreement and the Clean Energy for all Europeans package.

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Ministers present Presidency priorities to EP on women's rights, gender equality, social policy and employment

Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties Helena Dalli presented the priorities of the Maltese Presidency of the Council on women's rights and gender equality during a session of the European Parliament's FEMM Committee at the European Parliament on January 25.

Minister Dalli remarked how there is a growing commitment at a European level to prevent, combat and eliminate all forms of gender-based violence and violence against women.

In this regard, she referred to the Istanbul Convention which the Maltese Presidency has placed as one of its core human rights goals and to ensure that as many Member States as possible and the EU itself ratify the Convention. Minister Dalli



referred to the various events being organised during the Presidency including addressing the European conference on the elimination of violence against women, a high level Ministerial conference on the LGBTIQ roadmap and the commemoration of the International Day Against Homophobia through different activities and initiatives in Brussels. Minister Dalli also presented the main priorities of the Maltese Presidency on employment and social affairs to EP's Committee on Employment

and Social Affairs (EMPL) a day later, emphasising the stress being laid on the safeguarding of workers' health and safety.

Dr Dalli also referred to the revision of the Posting of Workers Directive and explained that the Maltese Presidency will work to reach a compromise on a text that would be easily understood by both the workers and industry.

She also tackled the upscaling of skills of women and men in the EU labour market, stating that the Maltese Presidency aims to discuss a set of Council conclusions to

be adopted in the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) meeting.

On his part, Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity Michael Farrugia referred to Malta's intention to tackle issues that have an effect on people's lives while also helping to consolidate Europe's social soul.

Education and Employment Minister Evarist Bartolo stated that based on the underlying theme of 'Making Work Pay', Malta will prepare draft Council conclusions with the aim of promoting initiatives aimed at incentivising unemployed persons to enter the labour market thereby preventing labour inactivity and minimising the risks of poverty and social exclusion.

Stakeholders call for better monitoring of contaminants in marine environment

A consultation session was organised by MEUSAC, in collaboration with the Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change (MSDEC) and the Environment Resources Authority (ERA), to discuss the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive which sets a number of goals to protect more effectively the marine environment across Europe.

Miraine Rizzo from the ERA explained that the European Commission is in the process of introducing a programme of measures to help achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) of the EU's marine waters by 2020 and to protect the resource base upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend.

"Environment-related targets were always there along with monitoring programmes aimed at assessing the marine environment but a programme of measures is now in place," she told a well-attended session.

A number of participants, mostly NGOs and representatives of research institutes, called for a better monitoring system to be introduced to assess emissions from ships particularly as a result of the ever-increasing number of cruise liners entering our waters.

"We have done well treating sewage in line with the Barcelona Convention but we need to follow



suit when it comes to monitoring contaminants in our seas as a result of ships and cruise liners and enhance existing regulations," one participant observed.

As a signatory to the Barcelona Convention, Malta is committed to comply with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.

Mr Darrin Stevens from the ERA said that the Authority is presenting the measures but that some aspects of Directive fall under the remit of other entities.

Consultation on the disposal of Electrical and Electronic Equipment

Another consultation session organised by MEUSAC concerned the draft amendments to the Waste Electric and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations and on a draft legal notice on the Out of Court Settlements for Producers of

Electric and Electronic Equipment Regulations with stakeholders present suggesting that the focus should be more on education and awareness rather than on issuing fines. The authorities need to help the public understand better the different ways in which one may sustainably dispose of items considered as WEEE.

The proposed amendments to the WEEE Regulations aim at introducing fines for the disposal of WEEE in the form of unsorted municipal waste, as well as increased timeframes for financial guarantees by schemes. It is also being proposed that a fee for the application of waste separation schemes is introduced.

The draft regulations on Out of Court Settlements for Producers of Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations were also discussed. Once adopted, the Regulations will prescribe the rules

for out of court settlement for those producers of Electrical and Electronic Equipment who have acted or act against the provisions of the Waste Management (Electrical and Electronic Equipment) Regulations.

Veterinary medicines

Following an EU-wide consultation with stakeholders on the revision of the legal framework for veterinary medicinal products, a consultation session with local veterinarians was held on January 20. The new regulations being proposed aim to make the consumption by animals of medicinal products safer while also aiming to prevent unlicensed use of such products and to cut down on unlicensed suppliers of veterinary medicinal products in order to bring about a level playing field.

Mr Stephen Spiteri and Dr Andrew Agius from the Veterinary and Phytosanitary Regulations Department led the discussion.

Mr Spiteri outlined the new measures that local veterinarians are expected to comply with once the proposal comes into force, such as the use of antimicrobials, new prescribing protocols, new record keeping systems and the retail of veterinary medicinal products.

Consultation session on quality of re-used water in the EU

Malta has biggest water scarcity issues in the continent – Hydrologist

MEUSAC recently also organised a consultation session on the 'Quality of re-used water in the EU' mainly in agriculture irrigation and aquifer recharge for reclaimed water use.

Manuel Sapiano from the Energy and Water Agency in the Office of the Prime Minister said that the Council recently agreed that water re-use

can be an important instrument to address water scarcity and to adapt to climate change as part of integrated water management.

Re-use of water has been mentioned in a number of documents and the European Commission is working on its first proposal for a directive expected to be presented later this year.

Mr Sapiano explained how as part of the ongoing public consultation on the reuse of water, the Commission is currently

requesting feedback on the potential benefits of water re-use in irrigation for agriculture. During the session, Water Treatment Engineer and Hydrologist Marco Cremona expressed his concern that the process may not be economically viable should the Directive be too

stringent and that monitoring requirements should, therefore, be reasonable and affordable.

Ing. Cremona asked whether the EU will provide funds to convince the public that the water is safe and for demo plants to be developed to which Mr Sapiano replied in the affirmative.



High-Level Group Meeting on Gender Mainstreaming meets in Malta

The High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming (HLG) met in Malta on February 1 and 2 to discuss issues pertaining to gender equality and its promotion. The HLG is an informal group created in 2001 and comprises high-level representatives responsible for gender mainstreaming at national level. It is chaired by the European Commission at regular meetings convened in close collaboration with the Council Presidency and plays a key role in the EU gender equality agenda, including in the

formulation, programming and implementation of the EU Gender Equality Pact and the programme of the Trio Presidencies.



Despite the progress achieved in recent years, persistent inequality remains in certain aspects such as the gender pay gap.

Addressing the meeting, Minister Helena Dalli spoke of the need for a sustained commitment “to continue to safeguard equal opportunities for each gender to ensure that using the potential of all in the economic, social and political matters of the society”.

While referring to women’s participation in the labour market, Minister Dalli stated that the

Maltese Presidency is pushing for the adoption of Conclusions on upscaling skills of women and men in the EU labour market by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO).

At the request of the Maltese Presidency, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) recently prepared and presented to the Working Party on Social Questions a Research Note entitled ‘Upscaling skills of women and men in precarious employment in the EU’.

Conference on violence against women and gender-based violence

“It is time for effective, coordinated action between Member States. This conference sets its goals high, and the Maltese Presidency is set on achieving them” - Minister Helena Dalli



Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties Helena Dalli and European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra Jourová

addressed a conference on violence against women and gender-based violence organised in Malta as part of the Maltese Presidency programme of events.

Minister Dalli said that the Maltese Presidency is fully committed to guarantee that negotiations on the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention register significant progress throughout the coming months. This ratification, together with the Member States’ ratification of the Convention, would result in a stronger framework of protection against violence, and provide a clear sign that Europe is united against violence.



Minister Dalli meets Gozo Regional Committee

When meeting the Gozo Regional Committee, Minister Helena Dalli spoke of the important role Gozo will play during the Maltese Presidency such as hosting conferences and technical meetings. Describing the themes that will be discussed during the Presidency as being of direct relevance to the daily lives of Maltese citizens, she stressed the need for the EU to be closer to the citizens at a time where some don’t see the EU as being relevant for them.

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What is in store in terms of facilitating the transition of youth workers in their working life?

In the field of youth, the Maltese Presidency believes in the role that young people can play in order to bring about the necessary changes. For this reason, we are committed to work towards empowering young people and towards helping them develop the necessary life skills and competences to face such challenges and facilitate a smoother transition to adulthood.

The Presidency is committed to work on this through various Council Conclusions it aims to adopt by the

Education, Youth Culture and Sports (EYCS) Council in May and which will aim at developing the right policy frameworks, initiatives and measures enhancing necessary support for all youth workers in their work with the younger generations. The Conclusions will also aim to call for measures to be taken at EU level, particularly in the context of the work that is currently being undertaken on the New Skills Agenda for Europe.

On a similar note, the quality and relevance of education should be linked to the requirements of the labour market and directed towards the provision of relevant skills. One kind of effective mechanism will be put in place

to help progress in this area and on the New Skills Agenda for Europe.

The Agenda will address skills development and the skills gap with a focus on employability, mobility, competitiveness and fair and balanced growth. It will look in particular at the skills needed, at all levels, to meet the challenges and make the best use of the latest developments, particularly in the digital field, and to ensure that people can develop and upgrade their competences to keep pace with an ever-changing labour market and societies. It will also propose specific EU actions and back up concerted policy efforts by Member States, aimed at promoting the active involvement of

relevant stakeholders in education, training and the labour market

Will consumers see an end to mobile phone roaming charges and geo-blocking during the Maltese presidency?

The first few weeks of the Presidency have been very rewarding in this respect. We have successfully concluded negotiations on wholesale roaming which shall translate in abolishment of roaming charges by the established deadline of June 15. Moreover, we are waiting for the EP to signal its readiness to engage with the presidency to start negotiations on geo-blocking.

Leaders also discuss future of EU and relations with new US administration

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Dr Muscat said that it was the first time in many months that EU leaders had agreed on such a thorny issue, that of migration.

EU leaders endorsed the Commission's proposal that an additional €200 million of the EU Trust Fund for Africa, a fund that was set up as a result of the 2015 Valletta Summit on Migration, will prioritise migration-related projects concerning Libya.

President Juncker said he was happy that the Commission's recommendations had been endorsed.

The Malta Declaration includes the decisions adopted by the EU28:

- training, equipment and support to the Libyan national coast guard and other relevant agencies;
- further efforts to disrupt the business model of smugglers through enhanced operational action, within an integrated approach;
- supporting where possible the development of local communities in Libya;
- seeking to ensure adequate reception capacities and conditions in Libya for migrants;
- supporting IOM in significantly stepping up assisted voluntary

return activities;

- enhancing information campaigns and outreach addressed at migrants in Libya and countries of origin and transit;
- helping to reduce the pressure on Libya's land borders;
- keeping track of alternative routes and possible diversion of smugglers' activities;
- continuing support to efforts and initiatives from individual Member States directly engaged with Libya;
- deepening dialogue and cooperation on migration with all countries neighbouring Libya;
- further developing the EU external migration policy in order to make it resilient for future crises.

EU leaders welcomed the intention of the Maltese Presidency, in close cooperation with the Commission and the High Representative, to present a concrete plan for implementation of the above listed measures to the Council at the earliest opportunity, to take work forward and to ensure close monitoring of results. The European Council will review progress on the overall approach at its meetings in March and in June on the basis of a report from the Maltese Presidency.



'MEUSAC's work had trickle-down effect on people living in Malta'



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Mr Micallef's and Mr Balzan's views on issues pertaining to Malta and the EU, including on migration, followed.

Mr Balzan explained that in 2003, prior to Malta joining the EU, his newspaper played a major role in pushing for Malta's accession.

"We did this because we felt that it was an opportunity for Malta to open up to this European idea," he said.

He added that Malta is firmly pro EU. "We are a small country and we have a lot to gain from it such as from EU-funded projects.

"When a road is built, everyone in Malta benefits from it," he continued.

Mr Micallef, who is conducting research on human smuggling and migratory flows, claimed that Malta had attempted to reduce the pull factor of migrants by imposing an 18-month mandatory detention policy out of fear that Malta would be inundated with migrants.

Turning to MEUSAC's work, he said that it had a 'trickle-down' effect on people living in Malta which, in turn, contributed to the positive effect in terms of the public's support for the EU.

He also referred to the first Eurobarometer survey following Malta's accession which immediately "started showing a positive outlook towards the EU and which improved over the years".



25th anniversary of the Treaty of Maastricht



February 7 marked the 25th anniversary of the signing in the Dutch city of Maastricht of the Treaty on European Union by the Member States of the European Community (EC). The Treaty came into effect on November 1, 1993 and is considered to be one of the most important agreements in the EU's history.

The Treaty on European Union (TEU) represented a new stage in European integration since it opened the way to political integration. It created a European Union consisting of three pillars:

the European Communities, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters (JHA). It also introduced the concept of European citizenship, reinforced the powers of the European Parliament and launched the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).

As a result, the European Economic Community became the European Community (EC) and from that point onwards, the EC started being called the European Union (EU).