

MEUSAC news

MEUSAC promotes debate on the future of Europe

Organises events on 'Future of Europe' reflection papers



All three events, coinciding with the re-launch of MEUSAC, attracted a good number of attendees as well as a number of experts who participated in panel discussions and workshops.

The events focused on three of the five reflection papers presented by the European Commission following the publication earlier this year of a White Paper on the Future of Europe that set out possible paths for the future of Europe following Brexit. It offered five scenarios as to how the Union could evolve by 2025, with the aim of starting off a European-wide process of reflection and discussion on the EU's future.

The reflection papers deal with harnessing globalisation, the social dimension of Europe, the future of EU finances, the deepening of the European Monetary Union and the future of European defence.

Since its re-activation in 2008, MEUSAC has striven to engage

the social partners, civil society and the public in discussing EU-related issues in an effort to help bring about changes, including far-reaching ones and to help government formulate the country's position on EU policy and legislation.

Thus, the aim of last month's events was to gather feedback that may contribute towards Malta's position on the different reflection papers. The outcome of the events is being documented and will be forwarded to the EU Secretariat within the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality for further consideration.

In November and December, MEUSAC also engaged in a campaign to rope in the public in the debate on the future of Europe, using various communication channels.

Inside: Pictures of events on future of Europe

MEUSAC assists local councils to obtain €2.8 million in EU funds for rural development



Throughout this year there was an open rolling call for funds under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for the enhancement of farm access roads (under Measure 4.3). MEUSAC provided assistance to local councils which expressed interest to apply for the funds available under this measure.

Nine out of the 10 projects submitted with MEUSAC's assistance were successful and will be receiving the funding required which amounts to a total €2.8 million. MEUSAC welcomes this very positive result and looks forward to assist more applicants during 2018.

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Season's Greetings
from the MEUSAC team



Brexit talks reach critical juncture

Talks to move to second phase

On December 15, the European Council met to discuss Brexit the first phase of the negotiation process – that regarding the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, due on March 29, 2019.

The meeting was preceded by lengthy talks between British Prime Minister Theresa May, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier.

The main disagreement that appeared to be holding up an agreement that could allow the two parties to move on to the second phase of the negotiations appeared to concern access to the Single Market and the Irish border.

An agreement regarding the Irish border was reached prior to the European Council meeting.



Effectively, this agreement would mean that Northern Ireland would remain in the Customs Union and in the Single Market, meaning that a hard border would not be created between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland which is part of the UK.

During the European Council, leaders welcomed the progress achieved during the first phase of

negotiations and deemed this to be sufficient to be able to move on to the second phase. This will involve talks on the transition and the framework for the future relationship between the UK and the EU27

The European Council also reiterated that since the UK will continue to participate in the Customs Union and the Single

Market (with all four freedoms – goods, persons, services and capital) during the transition, it will have to continue to comply with EU trade policy, to apply EU customs tariffs and collect EU customs duties, and to ensure all EU checks are performed on the border vis-à-vis other third countries.

In his remarks, European Council President Donald Tusk focused on the concept of ‘unity’, as he noticeably stated that the EU27 must now solidify their unity and hold internal preparations. He remarked that “opening the second phase of our negotiations wouldn’t be possible without the unity of the EU27, the hard work of Michel Barnier and the constructive effort of Prime Minister Theresa May”.

Following a meeting with Ms May, held on the margins of the European Council meeting, Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat spoke of the need for a ‘sensible agreement’ that does not place EU Member States at a disadvantage.

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Chamber of Commerce event



As negotiations between the EU and the UK enter a crucial phase with the decision to start discussing the future relationship once the UK leaves the EU in 2019, MEUSAC, the Chamber of Commerce,

Enterprise and Industry and the British High Commission in Malta organised an event aimed at exploring the nature of economic ties between business in Malta and the UK after Brexit. The event, which took place on December 4,



was addressed by James Ashton Bell, Head of Trade and Investment at the Confederation of British Industry. A discussion, moderated by Vanessa Macdonald, followed with a panel composed of Minister for the Economy, Investment

and Small Businesses Chris Cardona, Mr Ashton Bell, Ronald Attard, managing Partner of EY Malta and Stefano Mallia, member of the European Economic and Social Committee and of the Brexit Task Force.

Editorial

Looking ahead

When I was entrusted with the task of reactivating MEUSAC in 2008, I knew that the task ahead would be no easy one. Yet, I accepted the challenge and today, looking back, I am happy to see how far we have come in nine-and-a-half years.

It is not my intention to list our accomplishments, although I will highlight the fact that it was of an immense personal satisfaction to see MEUSAC placed on a much sounder footing with its establishment as an agency in May of this year. MEUSAC now enjoys a separate and distinct legal personality. This served as a spring board to re-launch MEUSAC in the context of the current scenario in the EU, taking

into consideration the experience gained with 13 years of membership.

As part of this process, we have also adopted a new brand identity that places the citizen as the main focus of what we stand for. Our main aim is that of connecting the citizen to the EU. Whether it is the consultation process we steer on various levels, the role of stimulating and leading a national debate on European ideals, values, objectives and long-term strategies, disseminating information or assisting with EU funding programmes, our purpose is that of keeping the citizen at the heart of the European project.

All this has been possible because over these past years I have had the privilege to lead a team of

mostly young, dynamic and highly professional persons who have been committed to ensuring that MEUSAC delivers. I take this opportunity to thank all those individuals who have formed part of the team at some point during the past nine-and-a-half years. Obviously, a special word of thanks goes to the current team. I am proud of the MEUSAC team and confident that together we can achieve even more.

Another special word of thanks goes to the Prime Minister, Dr Joseph Muscat, whose personal interest in MEUSAC has been crucial over the past four years, as well as to Minister Helena Dalli and Parliamentary Secretary Aaron Farrugia who are both providing MEUSAC with the much-needed support that makes it possible for us to look ahead with optimism. My gratitude also goes to Joe Camilleri, our Permanent Secretary as well as to all our collaborators in the Ministry.



Vanni Xuereb

Finally, I would like to thank all those with whom we collaborate for their interest and support. In some way or other, they have made possible all that MEUSAC stands for today. MEUSAC is not an end in itself but a means, or rather a process, aimed at strengthening the Europeanisation of this country and ensuring that Malta not only continues to make a success of its membership of the European Union but also remains and strengthens its role as a protagonist on the European level.

May I take this opportunity to wish you and your special ones all the very best for the upcoming festive season.

A photo journey through MEUSAC in 2017

MEUSAC 2017 in Review

2017: the year of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU and of the re-launch of MEUSAC



One of the events which kicked off 2017 was a Q&A session with Brussels-based journalists, which saw the participation of MEUSAC Head Vanni Xuereb, Migrant Report chief editor Mark Micallef and MediaToday managing editor Saviour Balzan.

The event was organised by MEUSAC and coincided with the official launch of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU, on January 11. Mr Micallef, who is conducting research in human smuggling and migratory flows, stated that MEUSAC's work had a trickle-down effect on people living in Malta which probably explains why Eurobarometer surveys constantly show that citizens in Malta feel European and have a bond with the EU.

The Maltese Presidency: MEUSAC was tasked with handling the blog of the Presidency website in a bid for MEUSAC to intensify its role of communicating on EU issues. The blog saw a number of experts from various fields speak about the different presidency priorities.

On January 20, MEUSAC participated in a dialogue organised by the Malta Business Bureau (MBB) and the European Parliament Office in Malta. The topic for discussion was the European Commission's proposal for a regulation on 'geo-blocking'.

MEUSAC assists various NGOs and local councils in garnering EU funds to sustain the projects they would want to implement. For instance in January, MEUSAC helped Down Syndrome Association benefit from €32,000 in EU funds after it assisted it in the application process. In 2017 alone, MEUSAC assisted in 85 EU funding applications. This year, MEUSAC hit the 38.3 million-euro mark in the amount of funds MEUSAC helped organisations garner since 2008.



As part of the Presidency, the EU28 participated in an informal summit held in Malta on February 3. The future of the EU, migration and preparations tied to the 60th Anniversary of the Rome Treaty, which eventually led to the publication of the European Commission's White Paper on the future of Europe, were up for discussion. MEUSAC was on the ground to deliver the outcome of each and every meeting and workshop held during the summit.

MEUSAC 2017 in Review



A day before the Malta informal summit, MEUSAC's Head and management met with newly elected President Antonio Tajani 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.

While in Malta to cover the Malta informal summit, BBC journalist Kevin Connolly interviewed Dr Xuereb on the ties between Malta, the EU and the UK, and on the importance of the friendship between Malta and the UK once the UK leaves the Union.

On February 15, Ms Mandy Falzon, Director, EU Funding within MEUSAC, delivered a presentation during an information session, which included workshops, organised by SKOP.

On February 27, a MEUSAC Core Group meeting discussed the European Data Economy.



On March 11, MEUSAC staff participated in the 16th Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) day organised by HSBC (Malta) which saw 15 companies participate. MEUSAC staff organised activities for children who come from families the Sisters of Charity work with.

On March 21, MEUSAC participated in a youth conference organised by *Aġenzija Żgħażaġh*.



On March 6, the Swedish Parliamentary Committee on EU Affairs visited MEUSAC.



Between March 23 and April 20, MEUSAC, the Embassy of Italy, the Italian Cultural Institute and the European Commission Representation in Malta, mounted an exhibition themed 'Ever Closer Union: The Legacy of the Treaties of Rome for Today's Europe', coinciding with the 60th Anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome.



On March 9, the Chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly (the lower house of the French Parliament), Elizabeth Guigou, participated in a discussion with MEUSAC staff. Mme Guigou was in Malta for a meeting of the Board of Governors of the Anna Lindh Foundation which she forms part of.



On March 29, a public dialogue on the future of Europe was held in Valletta. The successful event was organised by MEUSAC, the European Commission Representation in Malta and the Strickland Foundation. The dialogue took place on the same day that British Prime Minister

Theresa May triggered the process for the UK to withdraw from the EU. Prime Minister Muscat, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Commissioner Karmenu Vella participated in the dialogue.

On March 30, a joint MEUSAC Core Group and MCESD meeting with Minister for Finance Prof. Edward Scicluna discussed the National Reform Programme.



On April 3, MEUSAC and *Ekoskola* organised the 7th Young People's Summit which saw students from primary and secondary schools come together to voice their concerns and submit their proposals in relation to climate change. The students eventually presented the declaration to EU Environment Ministers during an informal Environment Council meeting held in Valletta on April 25.



On May 9, MEUSAC participated in a debate on the future of youth in the EU held at the University to coincide with Europe Day.

The Club of Venice – an informal network of the EU Member States' and the EU Institutions' communications directors, met in Malta on May 18 and 19 in its spring plenary which focused on the government and institutions' synergies in communication strategies, followed by a seminar on 'The refugees and migration crisis: a crucial test for public communicators'. The meeting enabled participants to investigate new trends calling for a transformation of public communication services by quickly learning lessons from recent events, national initiatives, the experience of civil society and suggested models. MEUSAC Head Vanni Xuereb addressed participants about the MEUSAC experience in keeping citizens connected to the EU through the consultation process as well as by disseminating information and assisting on EU funds.

On May 25, MEUSAC participated in a project launch of NGO Cross Culture International Foundation (CCIF) after MEUSAC supported the NGO to garner EU funds.



On June 19, the MEUSAC Core Group discussed Brexit, security, jobs and migration. Prime Minister Muscat attended the meeting, maintaining the practice of meeting members before attending the European Council meetings in Brussels.

On September 28, the MEUSAC Core Group discussed the European Commission's 'Reflection paper on the deepening of the economic and monetary union'. This is one of a series of papers published by the Commission over the past months and intended at launching an EU-wide process of reflection and debate on the future of Europe.

On September 29, MEUSAC participated in the sixth edition of Science in the City through its EU corner, hosting a 'See the Stars' event on its rooftop. Hundreds of participants got a glimpse of the stars from a telescope and met with University researchers to learn about their research and experiments.



On October 3, a delegation of 16 junior lawyers from the Regional Court of Munich visited MEUSAC.

Between October 5 and 6, Malta hosted the Ocean Conference. MEUSAC was on the ground to report what was said during the high-level conference and on the final outcome.

On October 19, a two-day conference was held as part of a three-year project funded by the EU called 'Enhancing Social and Economic Inclusion through Independent Living'. This after MEUSAC assisted the Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) to garner the required funds. The event was held by the MFOPD in conjunction with MEUSAC.



October 26, the MEUSAC Core Group met to discuss a proposed Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers. A one-minute silence was also observed in memory of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia who was killed in a car bomb on October 16.



Between October 27 and 29, Dr Xuereb attended a Congress entitled '(Re)thinking Europe' organised by COMECE and the Holy See at the Vatican. He was part of a delegation that also consisted of Rev. Prof Emmanuel Agius, Bishop Mario Grech, Archbishop Charles J. Scicluna, Parliamentary Secretary Dr Aaron Farrugia and MEP Roberta Metsola. Participants also had the opportunity to meet Pope Francis individually.



MEUSAC also hosted a number of consultation and information sessions throughout the year on the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the EU Directive on package travel, on the quality of re-used water in the EU, EU Consumer Law, Creative Europe, Domestic violence, Interreg and Erasmus+ funded projects.

As is normal practice, MEUSAC hosted a number of international students in a bid to inform them more about the EU and MEUSAC's roles.

Between November 1 and 13, MEUSAC held a string of events on the future of Europe, which mainly focused on reflection papers issued by the European Commission.



On October 30, MEUSAC had its official re-launch, "marking a new phase for the organisation, the third in its history", as Dr Xuereb put it. MEUSAC was established as an agency in terms of the Public Administration Act (Cap. 497) by Legal Notice 154 of 2017. The re-launch had been announced by Finance Minister Prof Edward Scicluna during the 2017 Budget speech and linked to the importance of strengthening the organisation to increase its relevance in the process of Europeanisation of the country. Minister for European Affairs and Equality Dr Helena Dalli and Parliamentary Secretary for European Funds and Social Dialogue Dr Aaron Farrugia and Dr Xuereb addressed the press. The re-launch also saw the rebranding of MEUSAC take place, including its logo.



MEUSAC participated in this year's *Skolasajf* edition throughout the summer, like in previous years, and organised EU-themed activities.



Social, Eastern Partnership and EU-AU Summits

On November 17, the European Pillar of Social Rights was proclaimed and signed by the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament and the European Commission during the Gothenburg Social Summit for fair jobs and growth.

The Social Pillar is intended to drive forward a social Europe for all European citizens. It aims to strengthen the

social *acquis* and deliver more effective rights to citizens. It focuses on employment and social aspects. The 5th Eastern Partnership Summit followed on November 24 which saw Heads of State or Government of the six partner countries, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine meet EU leaders in Brussels. They discussed the strengthening



of governance, economies, connectivity and societies and also adopted a joint declaration. It was the first time this summit was held in Brussels. It was held last two years ago in Latvia's capital city Riga.

On November 29 and 30, the fifth African Union-European Union (AU-EU summit took in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. A joint declaration was adopted

outlining common priorities for the EU-Africa partnership in four strategic areas: economic opportunities for youth; peace and security mobility and migration and cooperation on governance. The issue of migration took centre-stage. Prime Minister Muscat said that it was during the Valletta Summit in 2015 that a plan was kick-started to prevent illegal migration.



MEUSAC Core Group discusses Brexit negotiations

A Core Group meeting, held on November 27, discussed the state of play of the Brexit negotiations.



In his introductory remarks, Parliamentary Secretary for European Funds and Social Dialogue Aaron Farrugia referred to the UK's financial obligations once it leaves the Union, the rights of EU and UK citizens, and the issue revolving around Ireland's borders.

Minister for European Affairs and Equality Helena Dalli highlighted how the Brexit Unit within her ministry was moving towards

finalising the consultation process with the various ministries involved in a bid to emerge with a common stand. Glenn Micallef, coordinator of the Brexit Unit, explained the progress registered so far in terms of talks and the drafting of agreements to safeguard the interests of all citizens, some of which are based on already existing models. He also spoke about the prospects for future relations between the EU and the UK following Brexit.

Valorisation event held

The European Union Programmes Agency (EUPA) and MEUSAC organised a valorisation event on the Erasmus+ Programme on November 30.

The event served as an opportunity to present to

prospective applicants the main changes introduced in the 2018 Erasmus+ Programme Guide, particularly for volunteering projects, school partnerships and mobility projects.

Mandy Falzon, Director, EU

Funding at MEUSAC, gave an in-depth presentation on such changes and several tips on how to prepare a competitive project proposal.

Since 2008, MEUSAC helped various organisations garner over €35 million in EU funds.



MEUSAC to host Europe Direct

MEUSAC has been appointed by the European Commission to host a Europe Direct Information Centre (EDIC) for the next three years (2018 - 2020).

The EDIC will serve as a contact point for citizens by providing information on EU-related matters, personalised assistance to queries, as well as the organisation of events and activities to raise awareness on EU policies and initiatives.

Club of Venice

MEUSAC Head Vanni Xuereb participated in the plenary meeting of the Club of Venice held in Venice on November 23 and 24. Among the topics discussed by senior communicators from the EU Member States and institutions were challenges to rebuild citizens' confidence in the EU, the impact of the new media and communication landscape



on the public communicator's profession and on ethics, as well as capacity and capability building and behavioural

developments. Participants were also addressed by the Italian State Secretary for European Affairs, Sandro Gozi.

European Council: Brexit, Israel and PESCO top the agenda

EU leaders met on December 14 and 15 during a meeting of the European Council - the last to take place this year. The agenda included discussions on security and defence, the issue surrounding Jerusalem, education, and social issues. On December 15, EU leaders met in an EU27 format, which excludes the United Kingdom, to assess the progress of the Brexit negotiations.

The day before, consensus was reached with the launch of the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) on defence. In addition to this, the Council called for the adoption of the European defence industrial development programme, as well as a new instrument for capacity building in support of security and development after 2020.

Leaders also discussed the current situation in Israel, particularly the decision taken by the United States to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In

this regard, leaders reaffirmed their unequivocal commitment to a two-state solution with Jerusalem as the capital of both Israel and Palestine.



On education and social issues, leaders adopted various conclusions focusing on the development of the EU's social dimension, particularly on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at both EU and national levels. They also agreed on making the Erasmus+ programme broader and more inclusive, as well as increasing

the opportunities for European students to become fluent in at least two foreign European languages.

On December 15, the EU27 welcomed the progress achieved during the first phase of negotiations with the UK. It was decided that this progress was sufficient enough to move to the second phase of negotiations, in relation to transition and the framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK.

The European Council took note of the proposal put forward by the UK for a two-year transition period and agreed to negotiate a transition period covering the whole of the EU *acquis*, while the UK, as a third country, would no longer participate in, or nominate or elect members of the EU institutions, nor participate in the decision-making of the Union bodies, offices and agencies.

Prime Minister Joseph Muscat noted that before Malta could take a formal position on PESCO, it needed to evaluate exactly what kind of initiative PESCO would be, and how it would work within the parameters of the Maltese Constitution, particularly the neutrality clause.

On Brexit, he said that it is now time for the EU to keep the momentum going on the negotiations, whilst the UK ensures that it knows exactly what it wants out of a future relationship with the EU. He noted that ultimately, the EU and the UK need each other to maintain a close relationship.



MEUSAC team-building event

MEUSAC recently organised a team-building event for its staff at Xrobb l-Għaġin Nature Park. Employees were given a number of tasks, including to work together to create a bridge structure out of straws of different sizes and testing the bridge using a table tennis ball within a set time limit.