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Hon. Dr Lawrence Gonzi,  
Prime Minister,  
Auberge De Castille  
Valletta

Kindly allow us to introduce ourselves,

The Movement of Progressives and Moderates is a political and social project which is open to those persons who have one particular aspiration at heart - that of seeing Malta become one of the best countries to live in, in Europe.

One of the main goals of the movement is to promote a model of 'consultative governance' which is close to all citizens of Malta and Gozo. We are sure that many people have hopes and aspirations for these islands – the movement is ready to represent these hopes and aspirations.

As a movement, we believe that consultation and dialogue are crucial to be able to develop a national vision and put it into practice. We are interested in people's ideas and welcome feedback about people's experience of life in the present circumstances, daily - while going to work, while entertaining themselves, while experiencing the influence of the state and other institutions on their private/personal life and as a result the aspirations and proposals which are derived from this experience.

The Movement is particularly open to those persons who distinguish themselves from a partisan mentality. We believe that such individuals have the right to voice their views and give their contribution through active participation. The movement is precisely the appropriate space and the home which defends this democratic right. Additionally, the movement welcomes people from diverse backgrounds and levels of society, into the circle of dialogue and listening. The movement is also a movement for all, precisely because it is a movement which is also close to and inclusive of minorities.

As a movement we are most interested in progress, in the betterment of society rather than which party brings about progress. Our ambition is to improve the dialogue process on the Maltese islands, which are traditionally characterised by polarised and highly partisan political mentalities, which as a result are not always conducive to progress, especially when partisan thinking blocks the fundamental democratic processes of dialogue and reason.

Throughout the last months we have personally tried our best to listen to and enter into balanced dialogue with all sorts of people, coming from different social and political backgrounds. We have also created a number of on line focus groups on various areas and themes which require specialisation in line with the development of a national vision. The nature of focus groups is one with which people can relate to and contribute, even if they do not have technical or political expertise. The focus groups involve young and old, experts and lay people, theorists and practitioners.

This introductory letter represents the insights and recommendations generated within the focus groups and the informal meetings over the last months. We are presenting this letter both to the government and opposition in a way which is unpartisan and in a way which seeks progress and true change for the better without distinctions.

The logo of the movement symbolises the following: moderation and balance, openness to differences and the acceptance of diversity. This includes the participation of Nationalists, Labourites, the Green Party, the Church, individuals and other groups or institutions.

The logo also represents two-way communication based on the fundamental quality of listening with the ultimate aim of establishing a clear progressive vision and direction for the Maltese Islands.

Yours truly,

Wilfrid Buttigieg

## **Focus Group Reports**

### **Financial Services**

The following are our proposals for the financial services sector. Overall, participants within this focus group believe that the government is doing a good job. These proposals complement the current direction being taken by the government.

In connection with foreign direct investment, additional incentives could be offered to Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWF) to make the undertaking of large investments more attractive. Specific incentives for SWF to invest in local loss making entities through either primary (injection in a company) or secondary (buy-out) investments could be offered. Such incentives include the removal of uncertainties when negotiating the use/sale of land for big projects. As it stands the Government does not have full control to negotiate such deals since the relevant authorities would need to approve the decisions. The 'subject to planning permission' clause deters many investors from committing funds for large projects.

The facilitation of business and opening of corporate accounts through local banks for non-EU based companies is a growing service that Maltese banks are benefiting from. This business is made possible since Maltese banks offer flexibility in the way they operate whilst being very prudent in their operations with oversee by the Malta Financial Services Authority (MFSA). The efforts by the European Commission to harmonise the banking sector could reduce Malta's attractiveness for such companies to seek local services. The uncertainty that is brought about by regulatory compliance at the European level can disrupt business. A more comprehensive communications framework between the key financial players and the European Commission will help to minimise uncertainty and assist business.

The Maltese islands are not endowed with natural resources and rely mostly on the provision of services to generate wealth. In a bid to achieve higher competitiveness, the following are some proposals to this regard:

- The setting up of a strategic unit to strengthen ties with 'Sovereign Wealth Funds' who can invest substantially in large entities.
- Align policies of the Ministry of Finance, Malta Financial Services Authority and other players in the financial sector to increase Malta's capacity to assist funds relocation (Hedge funds/Mutual funds/Custodian Banks etc).
- Formulate policies at the European level to protect Malta's volatile financial sector from competitive erosion. One example is the veto of the proposed 'Tobin Tax' being discussed at the European level.
- Boost Malta's influence in the small states arena by taking the lead in international financial management. This will help build the reputation of the

Maltese Islands as an onshore (within the European Union) financial hub and in turn, will make it easier to attract business. A platform for this is the 'Small States Forum' meeting held on the margins of the World Bank/IMF annual meetings which is usually attended by the Central Banks and Ministries of Finance of Small States. (Note: the Secretariat of the Small States Network for Economic Development, which is an arm of the Small States Forum is located in the Annex of the Central Bank of Malta [www.ssned.org](http://www.ssned.org)).

- Reform Malta's old rent laws to let market forces operate freely in the real estate sector. The spillover effect will have a sizeable positive impact on the financial services sector through the release of equity from sale of properties.
- A trained workforce is imperative to sustain Malta's attractiveness to financial institutions seeking to relocate operations. As more institutions relocate to the Maltese islands, demand for skilled labour will outweigh supply. The lack of trained workforce drives wages upwards and erodes the island's competitiveness, as is happening to Ireland within the financial sector. To this extent, additional funds should be allocated to the University of Malta to assist the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy (FEMA) in keeping pace with the fast changing financial sector. The Faculty can use such funds to have periodic meetings with entities such as the MFSA, Banks, financial institutions and other key players in the sector that will provide feedback about the skills that are required from students when they seek employment post-graduation.
- Open discussions on pension reform through a 3 pillar system. The financial sector is key to support pension reform through the introduction of private pension funds and defined-contribution plans in the pillar system. The main aim of the white paper by the European Commission on pension reform in Malta consisted of the following recommendations, namely:
  - Create better opportunities for older workers to remain in jobs by adapting workplace and labour market practices and using EU funds.
  - Develop complementary private retirement schemes and optimise tax and other incentives.
  - Make supplementary pensions compatible with mobility through legislation protecting the pension rights of mobile workers and through pension tracking services across the EU.
  - Enhance the safety of supplementary pension schemes.

- Promote longer working lives by linking retirement age with life expectancy, restricting access to early retirement and closing the pension gap between men and women.
- EU to continue to monitor the adequacy, sustainability and safety of pensions.

Additionally, despite the fact, that a number of tax measures have been introduced to attract high net worth individuals, high calibre professionals and foreign direct investment to our shores, a number of measures could be used to render our system increasingly attractive or merely realistically affordable, depending on the case at hand. To this end Government has introduced a number of useful measures in the last budget, which to date have not yet been implemented via the pertinent legislation, namely the Budget Implementations Act 2012 and which is indeed long overdue. This is causing marked uncertainty for both practitioners and clients alike, particularly as income tax return deadlines approach and new non-Maltese resident clients seek to invest in Malta based on what was announced during the last budget. Against the current economic and fiscal milieu, Government should consider implementing the following measures:

Render the thresholds pertinent to the High Net worth Individuals more realistic in terms of what Malta has got to offer, particularly in relation to the yearly minimum tax liability and the 'Gratuitous Voluntary Deposit' related to Non-EU regulations for High Net-Worth Individuals. As the 'so called advantageous tax scheme', stands at present, half a million Euro, by way of a Gratuitous Voluntary Deposit, is too high, overtly unrealistic. We propose bringing this bond, down to Euro 175,000 (and Euro 50,000 for every dependant). Moreover, congruent to such rationale, the minimum tax liability for EU Nationals should be brought down to Euro 12,000 (plus Euro 2,500 – as is currently the case), while that pertinent to Non-EU nationals, should be brought down to a realistic Euro 18,000 (plus Euro 3, 000 per dependant).

Introduce more sophisticated rules in relation to the attainment of residence by way of a 'minimum investment criterion' than those currently in existence which are warped in uncertainty and merely in guideline form. By way of example, investment schemes could be introduced whereby an investment in Malta Government Bonds, share capital or loan capital in Malta companies, would grant Maltese long-term residence within a number of years, the higher the investment the lower the number of years required to obtain long term residence (UK based system) – subject to the fulfilment of necessary conditions such as appropriate medical cover.

Set up new tax advantageous schemes for foreign retirees, wishing to retire in Malta. By way of example a 15% tax rate on all foreign remitted pensions into Malta, subject

to a minimum tax liability of Euro 9,000 and a minimum qualifying property requirement of Euro 200,000.

Introduce Notional interest deduction rules applicable to Maltese resident companies as well as Malta branches of non-resident companies. This is a tax deduction for venture capital which alleviates the differences in tax treatment between finance raised through borrowed capital and finance raised through equity capital. The system allows companies to **deduct from their tax base a notional interest charge** (not stated in the accounts) corresponding to a specific percentage of their 'adjusted' equity capital. Valuable use ought to be made of lessons learnt from countries such as Belgium, in order to ensure that such rules are EU Compliant.

Introduce tax incentives in the form of tax shelters. This is a form of tax incentive designed to encourage the production/undertaking of activities in certain target sectors: for example audio-visual works and films. The system would allow companies wishing to invest in such target sectors to benefit from a tax exemption on retained profits worth up to, by way of example 150% of the capital actually invested.

## Sport, Health and Fitness

Various persons who hold sport at heart, believe that it is high time that this country grows out of the 'football centric' mentality that pervades the island. The main objection to the present status quo is the fact that many children end up being 'burnt out' from highly competitive football nurseries without being directed to towards other sports.

"Our major concern is that football nurseries might be passing the message 'you have not made it in soccer' and this could also possibly translate into 'you have not made it in sports' leading to a detrimental long term experience about sports and possibly, also health and fitness".

We believe that majority of these children who get such a message, could be potential sports champions in other disciplines (there are over 60 different sports disciplines one can choose from). It is also a fact that due to the size of our nation, we absolutely do not afford to 'waste talent' if we are really committed to improving our sports standing in the international sports arena. The crux lies in our national sports strategy and organisation.

As a solution a talent identification scheme in local schools was proposed together with a broader training base of movement and motor skills and the fundamental ABC's which lead to a more holistic physical literacy by the end of primary school for ALL children. Needless to say that primary school students are still far from the desirable goal of ½ an hour of physical activity daily. In practice, most school based physical activity takes place once a week, up to a maximum of twice a week. A government which manages to **guarantee** half an hour of physical activity daily in local schools would be considered to have achieved a milestone.

Also linked to the latter, one particular athlete who also has experience playing competitively abroad, recommended the following:

"Let's start from schools, making it obligatory to keep children practicing sport after school time, each day a different sport so we can give children the chance to understand the sport they like, and to make this more interesting. Competitions should be organised every month so the students have more motivation and something to look forward to!"

We have also recieved a very practical reccomendation from a Physical Education teacher who explained that many schools need to set up permanent structures in school yards to provide shelter from the elements (rain and sun) if an increase in the quantity and quality of Physical Education lessons is expected. From what we could gather many schools lack shading structures in their yards, under which children could have enough space to play or carry out lessons especially at noon when the sun is right overhead. Particular emphasis was placed upon the hotter months of the year (April-June/Septmeber-November) when the heat can be literally unbearable

and of detriment to students and teachers health alike. As per this teachers view and practical experience, such tent structures will help increase the quality and quantity of Physical Education lessons, since even class teachers would be better motivated to take students down to carry out a PE lesson, if the yard environment helps. At around noon of a recent hot day, this teacher commented:

“Can you imagine a class teacher taking his/her students down for their obligatory PE lesson in this heat? In a yard which does not offer an inch of shaded playing space? Such an action would go against the health authorities guidelines about protection from the harmful effects of the sun. A government who is ‘in touch’ and ‘close to’ what is happening in local schools would commit to provide an adequately sized playing area which shelters students from the elements in EVERY school yard. On certain days the sun is already unbearable by 8:20am.”

Apart from sports and Physical Education lessons, such a structure could also be used in a multi-purpose manner for assemblies and other generic school activities.

As a movement we do also see sports as the real drugs and addictions prevention strategy. There seems to be a strong drive in people towards smoking prevention and the belief in increased incentives for people to stop the habit, including financial, tax incentives or via fitness centre discount vouchers for persons with diabetes, smokers or severe obesity.

Re: smoking and passive smoking. The following is one citizen’s personal experience (an athlete who has a story to tell) in his own words:

“I have lost both parents through cancer caused by cigarettes, so I know. Adults who are addicted to cigarettes are a battle half lost, so we need to target school children, teenagers who have not yet started, we need talks in schools and MCAST showing students a feature of cancer patients vs. athletes and offering sports as the alternative solution to smoking”.

Another particular citizen asked, can wardens give tickets to anyone caught smoking inside bars, clubs, restaurants - why is it only police that can do so? This is a doable solution which we are proposing, especially when enforcing the smoking ban within towns and villages. Our proposal is that wardens should also be entrusted with such enforcement responsibility. As a movement we are also in favour of the recent change which has made smoking also illegal in hospitals, playgrounds and beaches.

Needless to say that smoking enforcement in Paceville still leaves much to be desired since many persons still smoke incessantly to the detriment of the health of the majority of non-smokers in every club, every weekend. The endless revenue which could be generated from such fines could be directed to a health and fitness fund which could also fund the other proposals within this field.

We have also met a specific athlete who is interested in promoting sports in village streets where streets are closed at specific times or days for kids to play in safely. This is particularly applicable to village core locations. This project could be called 'street kids'.

Various athletes mentioned the potential this country has in terms of sports tourism. The main complaint though is road safety and road standards for cycling in particular. Running and swimming facilities are acceptable but re: cycling we are still a long way to go and there is a general consensus that this is one of our major infrastructural failures when attracting sports related tourism.

Sport for persons with special needs – the main comment was 'we cannot forget them' more awareness about persons with special needs who practice sport is needed. One specific athlete said that he has met various people with special needs who simply need a push to start sports together with adequate facilities and resources. He believes that the government can be that kick start in terms of awareness and increasing participation via for example, wheelchair races. Also linked to the latter, subsidies for fitness centres to purchase specialised equipment for persons with special needs. Such equipment needs to be more widespread and not only located in Marsascala. Fitness centres require more government support to cater for persons with special needs.

Various members mentioned taxing junk food more specifically via a 'fat tax'. The direction of the proposal seems to lead towards making junk food more expensive and healthy options more affordable via a form of proactive taxation system which favours and promotes healthy foods.

A fundamental point related to the above is about addressing junk food vans which are strategically parked outside primary and secondary schools doors day in day out throughout the scholastic year, at the start and end of every school day in total contradiction with the educational message which is passed on to students within schools. This reality is being emphasised in line with the reality that this country ranks as one of the most obese countries in Europe. Our proposal is legislation which does not allow doughnuts, 'pastizzi' or soft drink vans up to a circular perimeter or 400 meters around school gates as soon as school starts or finishes. The situation at the moment is truly mediocre and an outright contradiction to the endless hours of work done by teachers within schools.

The setting up of a specific anti-gym drugs squad was also proposed, to tackle the problem of harmful drugs distribution inside and outside fitness centres. Here reference is being made to steroids and other drugs which are sold by private individuals even though these are known to cause short and long term health side effects for the end user. Some fitness centres are notorious for the easy access to such drugs.

Another interesting proposal was to create a 'national fitness clubs/centres committee' which works together with the health promotion department to pass on a national message of health and fitness. This committee could bring fitness centres to work in synch together and create national sports events for all of fitness centre members. An element of organised competition between fitness centres could also be introduced to increase motivation.

Subsidy for gyms to create in-house lecture premises to educate gym members via lectures in collaboration with health promotion department specialists. There was a consensus about addressing the very widespread protein diets which are effective but have detrimental health side effects. Education about this widely used dieting system is seen as very important, since there is a severe lack of awareness.

'Adopt a school' fitness centre synergy between schools and local gyms/fitness centres. This should work in the interest of the students to introduce them to a health and fitness way of life via the most nearby fitness centre from an early age. This synergy could also be linked to the yearly health fun day or sports day.

Another proposal linked to health and fitness looks at the elderly. As a solution, a structure via local councils is being proposed to transcend beyond coffee and tombola outings and/or at least include carefully adapted health and fitness sessions for the elderly.

The only proposal we received about alcohol was the one where since pictorial health warning signs are mandatory on cigarette packets. Why not on spirits and liquors?

Another proposal we received is about government sports facilities. The idea was to have a website that channels bookings for any government sports facility. People would simply check online for the venues available and book accordingly.

There is a growing consensus that investments in the fitness industry pay back not only in the long run by cutting health care costs, but also in the short run, holistically as a country. People's psyche, moods and socialisation opportunities increase thanks to sport, health and fitness. Sport could be a perfect answer to overcoming loneliness, depressions or other psychological or physical conditions.

## Youths

The following are the proposals received to date:

Affordable fitness centres open till late, targeting specific areas such as the Bugibba, Qawra and Marsascala locations where there could be a large number of vulnerable youths possibly coming from lower income families. Fitness centres are seen as a tool in terms of crime prevention by providing a meaningful and motivating activity for youths, apart from being seen as a medium to develop discipline.

Tax exemptions such as 5% Vat for Under 18 youth gym memberships were also mentioned, this would be of help in order to encourage youths to become fitness centre members. This proposal would help youths to get off the streets and make better use of their time and energies.

To confirm the latter view, I have met a businessman last week who is willing to equip a fitness centre in the Bugibba/Qawra area instead of opening a restaurant. This goal has developed within him after he recently became aware, that many youths in the areas are coming from families who are under or close to the poverty line. He rightly believes that these youths require more support and direction because they spend a lot of time wandering about leading to a greater possibility of criminality and bad habits. This businessman is asking for premises in the area - he will then invest from his private funds and also work on a voluntary basis to attract youths towards his fitness centre. These were his precise words:

“I can invest in a restaurant but I want to do something meaningful for these Bugibba/Qawra kids, because life is not just about making money”.

Beyond the fitness centre, this same businessman is interested in creating another regatta event which goes wider than the annual regatta villages. This time on a more national level, by holding another annual regatta event in the north of the island with more towns (even from the centre of Malta) including their own teams to compete in a national event which marks another national feast or occasion. This could be organised better via local councils. One of the new teams could possibly sprout right from the fitness centre he is willing to create. He has a ‘Bugibba and/or Qawra and/or St.Pauls Bay regatta team’ which competes both in the traditional regatta and in the new one.

## **Democracy and the Local Political Scenario**

From the feedback gathered to date we could deduce that various locals are experiencing negative or on the other hand unrealistically positive political party campaigns i.e. fed up with the lack of objectivity and incorrect information passed on to the people by both major parties. Basically various persons, apart from experiencing an insult to their critical intelligence, also end up feeling disillusioned about the levels of discussion and thinking promoted by political party media or at times even via the most prominent TV programs on the national TV station.

Based on our consultative experiences with various people, we can state that 'tribal partisan political discussions' are alienating people from the true value of politics and that a growing number of people are getting 'fed up' of the way we do politics locally. Having said so, what is most worrying from a democratic perspective, is the fact that the way political parties act nowadays causes a sentiment of dissatisfaction in people which as a result alienates them from making use of or getting closer to the political tool. A tool which we believe has the intrinsic potential to be one of the noblest social services.

One specific correspondent asked us specifically as a movement to write to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the President and the Archbishop and ask them to react to the levels of political hatred on social media. He believes that this should be one of our first initiatives as a movement.

Various people we met also believe that there is room for more consensus between political parties about areas and issues which work in the national interest and that both parties should lead by example by working together and publically displaying their agreements.

We have also experienced a general consensus, that both major parties 'opportunistically' learn best what it means to 'listen to the people' only prior to an election. As a movement we believe that 'consultative governance' should take place throughout a whole legislature, and not just at the end. Consultancy with the people must start from the first day when a party is elected in government and not in the last months before an election.

We have also experienced an overall enhanced enforcement, increased transparency and accountability by ministers. There seems to be a drive in people who request a more accountable and responsible government. In the words of a respondent:

“We need leaders who are accountable, persons who take responsibility for the decisions they make.” In this case, a specific reference was made to the Minister for Transport who was requested to resign for the mess created.

Another proposal was to remove various government authorities from the control of ministers and make them answerable to parliament. This will transform authorities from 'puppet authorities' to independent authorities which get things done in the national interest.

Another plea by various individuals was to make parliament a full time job, having said so the timing of the recent increase in parliamentarian's income was experienced as highly insensitive when compared to what people most persons were going through. The major complaint received was related to the timing rather than the principle behind the increase. Having said so, as a movement we are not against parliamentarians having more resources to be of service and becoming full time politicians with a decent wage, since we believe that this would strengthen the local democratic system.

Last but not least, nepotism (which is still experienced as common practice) leaves many honest, hard working and merit oriented citizens perplexed and frustrated. As a movement we are in favour of competence and merit as the antidote to this way of proceeding.

## Education

Maltese schools seem to be experienced by many as 'fairly good schools'. Various persons acknowledged the progress already achieved in the local system, but many also kept insisting that there is still further progress to be made, especially in relation to the vision of becoming amongst the best countries in education, in Europe.

The first proposal received was to keep transforming the system further, to go beyond learning factual knowledge. An educational system which encourages students to develop their thinking skills and stimulates students to expand their creativity.

There was also a call towards more attention to detail in education and towards a wider perspective which goes beyond school doors. An educational system which 'reaches out' and starts off from the moment students leave their homes especially during school transport or while students wait for school to start (because various students arrive at the school gates or grounds well before school starts officially). A lot could happen during this transition time between home and school, experiences which could also leave an impact (positive and negative) on a student's life via informal education. Leaving such time spans unattended and/or without an educational strategy is not recommended.

Another proposal received was to allocate a social worker per school or college. It is a known fact in the educational arena that most educational challenges have their axe root which starts at home, the place where students receive the most powerful educational experience ever, from their 'primary educators' which refers to their parents or guardians. In many cases if we do not tackle educational difficulties from their source (especially with the most challenging students) most efforts by the school and teachers (known as secondary educators) will be futile. Therefore the proposal is that schools 'reach out' further from school doors and strategically target the places that matter i.e. home and parents – the primary and most influential educators. This could also be done by facilitating teachers or educational specialists to visit student's homes so as to assist parents so as to how to help their students with homework's etc. apart from social workers for the neediest students.

Apart from 'reaching out' another fundamental must in education is 'improving schools from within' via the words 'teacher empowerment' and the importance of 'teaching resources'. It is not the first time that we heard freshly graduated student teachers who claim that they spent over a thousand Euros from their personal funds and first wages just to build up an adequate set of teaching resources due to the lack of support to be able to create interesting and innovative lessons. From a professional point of view this situation leaves much to be desired. Therefore our proposal is to equip teachers with the resources they require from the first days they enter the schooling system and most of all at such a crucial point in time when teachers would have the highest level of drive and enthusiasm to make a difference

in student's life as true teaching professionals. Teacher empowerment in the beginning of teacher's careers is fundamental and can leave an impact on teacher's motivation for many years after. The impact can go either way – positively or negatively, the responsibility so as to which direction the impact goes, lies in the hands of school administrators and their 'empowerment skills' together with their 'empowering budgets'. As a movement our concrete proposal is to give every freshly graduated teacher a Euro 500/1,000 budget to spend on teaching resources as per his/her most recent university updates in education. The same resources purchased remain at the school, but at least such an initiative would empower new graduated students to feel that they are empowered owners and respected professionals within the system.

To further emphasise the importance of 'teacher empowerment' I will include a personal experience which happened nine years ago as a freshly graduated physical educator. At a time when I used to work (quite extremely) till midnight daily, planning lessons and thinking about what to do for students etc. as a truly dedicated and fully motivated teacher. I remember visiting an assistant head of school at his office after my first few weeks in school and explaining that we needed a more hygienic and better equipped first aid box rather than a number of 'used ice packs, as the one size fits all method of treatment given to all students for all sorts of injuries'. I had also mentioned the importance of being trained in first aid rather than having unqualified and untrained PE teachers offering this service to students. The reaction of this assistant head of school was one which I have never forgotten to date - I can hear his words with clarity, as if they were being said right now, in the present moment:

“We have always worked like that over here and we do not need your proposals, just go get your lessons done.”

The message by the system was clear. The point being made through this example goes beyond the first aid box - it's from a motivational point of view. Because such messages leave can leave a negative impact on a teacher's professional status and perception for many years after. Demotivating administrators can scar the 'soul' of a highly motivated and dedicated teacher right from the outset of a professional career. I am sure that this experience has been shared by many fellow professionals within the local educational system. Having said so, being a sports person and thus quite a natural fighter - I have never really given up and by time I have also learnt how 'change' in order to be more effective within the system itself and have managed to bring about changes just the same via a better strategy. But the message remains clear as a professional with nine year teaching experience in over eight local schools and does not retract from the need to have better trained and more empowering school administrators who are capable of intelligently empowering newly graduated teachers as well as motivating and supporting more experienced teachers. Beyond simply 'building new schools' if we want a 'finer' educational system, we need improve our levels of 'attention to detail'. One way is

by making sure that school administrators are capable of handling enthusiastic teachers with attention, by assisting them to believe that they own the system and are treated and respected as true professionals, from the first day they enter school gates as graduated educators.

Linked to the above, there also seems to be a sense of disappointment among various educators who decide to pursue their studies further and take private interest in their vocation when compared to educators who stop at their first degree or simply satisfy the bare minimum requirements of their job description. The gist of the argument seems to be that there is little to motivate a teacher to go that extra mile within the present system. The proposal received was that dedicated educators who study or take up initiatives beyond their basic requirements should at least be rewarded via seniority points, especially if they also take up further studies such as at Masters or Doctorate level (at present these educators are awarded a slight increment in their salary on its own and this surely does not compensate for the efforts made). The government should thus motivate dedicated educators so that the educational system will have better trained and more competent educators in the interest of students and of the educational system itself.

On a different note, another recommendation received, is that Animal Welfare needs to be taught in schools – for ex. on the lines ‘Dogs Trust’ works, since they already run excellent workshops in schools. If we can educate the future generation about animal welfare then both students and pets at home and animals in general will benefit.

These last two proposals were received from a person who has justice at heart and this is the suggestion we received in her own words: May I suggest that the educational authorities would consider the following: Every school would include a miniature courtroom installed in the school, complete with bar, jury box, witness chair, a place for the prosecutor and defence council, and press box. Children would serve on juries to try playmates who have been fighting, climbing fences or otherwise committing breaches of playground peace, or even homework carelessness, and playing truant. Students can also appoint a fellow student lawyer to defend them. Those found guilty are sent to jail - maybe a wood closure for sentences from 10 to 60 minutes. The children would thus appreciate their responsibility in having law at their school instead of passing over the buck to the teachers and the head of school. To be honest I am fed up with the schools thinking that the Christmas play and other play on a stage is the most creative issue for students. It could be fun and not so much fun at the same time. Apart from the latter such an initiative could increase and empower the natural and God given sense of justice in children.

Linked to the latter model of schools as realistic miniature societies, one could also include a policeman or police woman (possibly retired) per college who works hand in hand with the prefect of discipline. This officer can be seen around in the school

environment as a 'policing educator for children' possibly with an adapted uniform. This could also be an opportunity for police officers who have retired to be re-integrated into the work force as educators. Such posts could be given to individuals who take up formal education related training at tertiary level which then synergises the educational field with their experiences within the police force. Such a 'student friendly' presence in schools could also be a way of attracting students to possibly take up a career with the corps at a later stage in life. This proposal could also help as a deterrance programme for children/adolescents from committing offences at a later stage in their lives via the creation of mutual trust between the police and youths/children.

## Animal Welfare & Awareness

The following is the text provided by one particular correspondent who holds animal welfare at heart: Malta and Gozo are renowned for their stray dog and cat problem where there are an estimated 60,000 dogs and even more cats and kittens. These stray and abandoned dogs and cats are all over the island resulting in hundreds of unwanted litters of puppies and kittens being born each day. A single pair of cats and their kittens can produce as many as 42, 0000 kittens in just 7 years. The situation is getting worse despite several organisations working towards neutering all the strays on the island.

Malta has also allowed a dolphinarium for tourists, a circus's with animals, horses and cabs to take tourists around. Where are the laws governing the welfare of horses and cabs better known as 'Karozzin' which are seen around the tourist areas? One can easily hear tourists complain, since the horses stand there in 100 degrees, no shade and no water. Stricter regulations are needed re: specified total working hours, breaks, distance the horses are allowed to walk to their destinations, shelters to be built and regular checks by the animal welfare. Many of these horses live in garages. Can one consider the Maltese as animal friendly when facing the latter?

We are aware that a government paper <http://www.doi.gov.mt/en/legalnotices/2011/05/LN199.pd> has been written setting out new regulations and laws for all animal sanctuaries, pet shops, animal keepers, importers etc. It has not been voted through the house yet but has appeared as a legal notice this year. Further Government help is needed to help tackle the problem which we are highlighting below:

The homing centres and sanctuaries are permanently full, presently the SPCA have around 100 dogs and 50 cats, the AAA have 150 dogs, SPCA Gozo have around 25 dogs, 30 kittens. The regulations are needed but that means that less dogs and cats can be taken into the homing centres/sanctuaries and re-homed. What will happen to all these strays and abandoned animals? Facebook is full of hundreds of pages of 'Causes' – where Facebook users click to share the Cause with their FB friends – the Maltese are sharing hundreds of these causes. The media are now taking on board that people want to learn about animals, help where they can, improve their education. The public care, the tourists care, the Govt may care but they are not doing enough about the growing problems within Animal Welfare.

Animal NGO's no longer get any government financial backing. The homing centres and sanctuaries are willing to do their work for them but they won't provide support and any financial assistance. A working party needs to be formed to include representatives from all homing centres, sanctuaries etc. Government must get all the sanctuaries and homing centres working together – at present some of them are in 'competition' with each other. The new laws are to be made more practical for

animal homing centres, adequate time given to comply with these laws and support from the government to help them adhere to the new regulations. Each centre needs to be reviewed on an individual basis. Government support is required financially but also with the provision of land and planning permission for existing and new animal NGO's.

The feeders - what fantastic and dedicated these people are to feed the strays all over the island, day in, day out - do you think they get any help from the Government? No.

There is also the need to set up Animal Welfare in Gozo. At present Animal Welfare will not go to Gozo. SPCA Gozo have been trying to get new homing centre premises for many years due to the stray problem on the island. They eventually got the land but again been turned down for planning. Why is this so, when it is so badly needed? If the government wants the stray problem under control in Gozo why isn't the government working with and supporting animal welfare?

SPCA Malta has been promised a new homing centre for 9 years. So far only failed promises from the governments end. In contrast the government, virtually 'overnight' got planning through and built a dog playground at Ta' Qali. Great idea but would have been better to help rescue and save dogs before giving them a playground?

With the new regulations coming into force, any dog or cat found and handed into the police has to be kept for 7 days. The sanctuaries are permanently full so what happens to them? The police will have the option of putting them down, with no dog pounds at police stations, what other choice will they have?

Under the new laws as from 30.4.12 everyone has to have their dog micro-chipped instead of the old dog licence. Brilliant news but will the government enforce this law?

Finally, an Animal Welfare foundation is a must but made up of representatives who know what is needed and will make things happen.

## **Business and Public Tenders**

The 'Ta' Qali Crafts Village' - needless to say that the delay in getting the project done after so many years is a message in itself. One particular businessman complained that various competitors within the village do not produce genuine crafts and simply import mass produced products. A person is kept on display simply for cosmetic purposes and not because the products being sold are actually genuine crafts.

From a more generic point of view, an SME businessman has sent us the following feedback:

"The problem of getting paid. We need a maximum credit limit. It is the small companies which hurt and not the large companies. The reason being, the large companies have the cash flow and earn interest in the bank. The small companies wait to get paid and pay interest to the bank. Various countries around the world use a max credit duration limit. In France (if I am not mistaken it is 40 days). If you do not pay by the 40<sup>th</sup> day your financial world around you will start to crumble. This 90 and 120 day credit duration was required in Malta many years ago when the hotel got paid by Tour Operators. Today most people book and pay on line, so there is no further need for this system."

"Small companies are not always being given the chance to tender for small, medium or large projects. One of our import lines is special bathroom accessories in stainless steel, such as toilets, sinks, dispensers, etc. We have a very good brand and can compete price wise. But since we cannot submit a tender for "part of" the products needed we must resort to going contacting the various large companies which usually are awarded such tenders in order to try and sell our products. First of all most of these large companies tell us they import their own similar products. Secondly government probably end up paying a higher price for an inferior quality product. In terms of quality - we specialize therefore we know our products and the quality of products we supply. Turnkey companies specialize first and foremost in project management therefore quality and functionality are not high on the importance list. In terms of price, should we be allowed to tender we would offer a particular item for Euro 100. But since we can't tender we are obliged to offer this same product to large turnkey project managers at a price of Euro 85 who will probably add a margin of anywhere between 25% and 100% to our discounted price. Therefore the price contracted by Government with the turnkey contractor will be higher than the price we would have offered. Small companies like ours can only tender via the large companies. This is not fair. And the large companies get bigger. Big business dictates."

Proposal: A Government database of products frequently purchased by Government or Government entities needs to be established. This database can be considered a market place where companies can include product descriptions, technical

descriptions, images and any other factual information required. Besides the factual information companies must also include a price for this product. What is important is that competing companies are allowed to see the factual and pricing information for each and every single product. This price can be changed upwards or downwards once a year, once a month, once a week or once an hour, depending upon the strategy of the individual company. This is open competition. The system has its difficulties too since Government personnel could inform certain companies of a pending purchase to be made on a certain day and at a certain time. In fact, purchasing personnel within Government should inform all the companies having products the “pending required products” that a pending purchase will be made. Difficulties could be ironed out. But, what is important is the price will always be as low as it can go.

## The Family

Email received from a person who is going through separation procedures:

“If the church and the state could do something together prior to marriage it would be better. I think that there should be a professional family therapist who meets couples or possibly individual persons before they commit to marriage. In this way the therapist could help the couple or individual to ask the important questions which help a person think well before committing. This goes beyond the religious aspects alone.

As a movement our proposal is that the state provides marriage preparation courses which are run by family therapists and professionals in the field.

Also mentioned: “Before a person who is considering separating meets a lawyer, we need to have a system which facilitates access to a professional mediator who would have an interest in saving the marriage rather than exploiting the vulnerability of the person at such a delicate and difficult time for purely financial interests”.

P.S. in no way are we stating that all lawyers are the same or that all lawyers exploit the situation for financial gain. The solution proposed is to facilitate access to professional family therapists rather than lawyers when a relationship would be close to a breakdown.

## **Tourism**

We received a suggestion that rubbish collection in tourist areas should take place as early as possible in the morning for the simple reason that various tourists are also early risers and end up walking on pavements with endless mounts of garbage bags from the business of the night before. This suggestion was received after a local who has the country at heart was walking in the Bugibba area around 9am on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

The lack of enforcement of the 'written law' which prohibits construction in certain areas during the touristic peak season is also a frustration for various individuals who have invested in the tourism industry. This complaint came to us from a person who suffered severe losses due to having to relocate his clients to another hotel due to construction works which used to start as early as 7am right through a whole summer. The response this person received from the contractor/owner involved was the following:

“Go, try stopping me, let me tell you who I am... and he versed a surname of a high ranking and notorious local family.”

Another respondent's proposal was that the prohibition of construction works should also be extended to road works during the tourism peak seasons.

## **Valletta**

Revamp of the market to one which is up to markets of major cities abroad including luxury restaurants, high quality food items. This recommendation was received from a Maltese citizen who visited the Copenhagen market and was remarkably impressed. Another respondent mentioned the natural foods market in Barcelona.

We also recieved a reccomendation to give the arts and artists more specifically a greater sense of ownership and empowerment when working upon the overall aesthetics of the capital city.

## Environment

The first proposal received is that the Environment Protection Directorate (EPD) within MEPA, the Malta Resources Authority (MRA) and the Environmental Health Unit (with the Public Health) be amalgamated into a single Environment Authority so as to consolidate their operations and their regulatory/enforcement capacities. At present we have three weak environmental authorities, all of the lacking resources and enforcement capabilities.

Another recommendation was to implement environmental change via local councils, by going beyond planting trees and playgrounds and making sure that all developments in local council localities are checked for the construction of rainwater cisterns, as required by law. This will increase the strategic water reserve of every locality and of the country and reduce flooding. In a citizen's own words:

"40,000 litres per minute of publicly-owned water is being pumped up by private companies or individuals, 24 hours a day, 365 days and every minute all of the above know and decide to look the other way. One may argue that this is a statement, not a proposal. Proposal? Defining ground water as a public resource (as are antiquities) in the Maltese legislation and as suggested in the constitution of 1974 would be a good start. In 40 years, no party and no MP has taken the bother of legislating in favour of public water. We have MP's and parties proposing private members bills, motions, legislation about everything under the sky, but water? Nah, probably because it's underground. Out of sight, out of mind and oh yes, no votes there."

As a movement we do support this citizen's message on the grounds that a serious government takes up the responsibility to be a guardian of the common good vs. the interests of short sighted private individuals.

It is also very clear that there is an ongoing call for more controlled developments, especially in residential areas where there is a high building intensification already. In a contributor's own words:

"Do we really need all these apartments? Is there a balance between demand and supply of these monstrous developments? Nowadays it is almost 'sad' to go to Sliema due to the large amount of building sites, dust, cranes etc. It is no longer a pleasure to take a stroll when all you see is concrete and experience the lack of fresh breathable air. Various previously sought after areas have lost their 'glitz' due to surrounding construction."

Another problem is the lack of parking space in certain areas like Sliema or Valletta. This respondent is in favour of the creation of underground or multi storey car parks.

Various persons are in favour of the restoration of old buildings and facades which bring them back to their former glory, especially in areas such as Valletta and the three cities. The waterfront model was seen as a success.

### **Public Health**

Met a group of people from the Zebbug/Rabat area who have a problem with a certain notorious individual who more than three times a week illegally burns skips refuse and tyres from an enclosed field close to Gianpula in Rabat. This action (apart from being illegal) is of severe chronic health related damage to residents since the toxic fumes engulf their private residences. Residents complained that they have already spoken to the authorities and at times even the fire engine has been called to extinguish the fire but to no avail. This person seems to having the upper hand vs. the interests of the community and the common good because there are legal loopholes which cannot incriminate him even though there are hundreds of reports which have been filed with the police. One can easily spot the location of this crime visually just by watching over the Gianpula fields area. Further information is available in hand but residents spoke on the condition of anonymity due to fears that this person could eventually track them down in person.

## **Social Justice**

There is a growing sentiment in people about local distribution of wealth, where various persons believe that very few people (who are already very well off) are eating a lot and more than they should out of the 'national cake'. People are experiencing a situation where some specific rich individuals are getting richer and the middle and lower class is getting poorer.

We have met various persons who witnessed an increase in poverty over the last two years. This has also been factually confirmed by record queues for food rations provided by the EU together with statistics provided by a number of NGO's.

## **Justice (Law Courts)**

Our proposals to better the situation are the following:

- A) Change to notification procedure.
- B) Consideration into Speedy trial procedure as proposed by USA.
- C) Sittings should be allocated times and a period for their hearing (very few courts are already doing this, and the system is really working. This should be made compulsory for all, for ex.
  - a. Sitting at 9am.
  - b. Purpose: presentation of plaintiff's proof.
  - c. Time allocated: 20 minutes.

From a more general point of view, the main comments made where that 'justice delayed is justice denied' and that the real significance of punishment is when it is given in real time and as close as possible to the criminal act. Another respondent asked if the law was truly the same for all. Another expressed her frustration about certain sentences and legal loopholes which do not bring justice in relation to the severity of certain crimes such as those which involve animal cruelty or hit and run traffic accidents.

## **Civil Liberties**

To date we received one comment re: gay marriages which read the following:

"Denmark will introduce gay marriage next year and we can only aspire for a cohabit. My husband is my lover not a sibling or an acquaintance. I want what is mine and I'm not going to beg for it anymore. My mother did not go begging to marry my father!"

## **Racism**

A particular resident hopes for change towards a more just, equal, free, tolerant and prosperous Malta. He believes that we cannot solve racism challenges unless we change our way of thinking by understanding that we may have different stories, that we may not look the same, sound the same, act the same, we may not have come from the same place, but we hold common hopes, want to move in the same direction - towards a better future. Race is an issue that this respondent believes Malta cannot afford to ignore. In his own words "the past isn't dead and buried about black and white around the world, in fact, it isn't even past." "Racial hatred on the Island is real, it's powerful". This is his message of awareness together with an appeal for further educational action by the authorities.

## **Political and Religious Tolerance**

We have witnessed a need for increased local political and religious tolerance which also needs to be addressed from an educational and leadership point of view, by the country's political leaders. Just to give a practical example: a week ago a friend introduced me to another person as a person involved in the Movement or Progressives and Moderates. This person simply (quite arrogantly) said 'ok bye' without even allowing an introduction or any form of dialogue to take place. My reaction was to state that it is time to progress beyond such thinking and that this was surely not the attitude adopted by Dr. Eddie Fenech Adami who promoted dialogue and political tolerance. This comment seemed to irk this person further almost to a point of aggression and therefore as a result I chose to back off by shaking hands and stating that it would be best to discuss such matters another time and in a more appropriate context, since we were at a noisy social event. After various experiences of this kind, I can personally confirm that there is a lot of room for improvement locally in terms of political tolerance and the promotion of dialogue. The country's political leaders have a fundamental role to play in the process of reconciliation between people via their example, especially prior to a general election when political tensions tend to increase.

## **Maltese Language**

A contributor proposed that foreign languages are given their due importance, following the reduction of foreign languages in the most recent National Minimum Curriculum. Another foreign language apart from English and Maltese needs to be a prerequisite as before, since nowadays students are focusing on Maltese and English without specialisation in at least, one other foreign language.

Another proposal is that political parties commit themselves prior to the next general election to promote the use of Maltese as the main language for teaching instruction in local schools.

Another proposal was to make sure that all political parties' online media instruments make use of the Maltese language and Maltese digital alphabet.

Another proposal was to define the status of the Maltese language in the constitution in further detail and what this means exactly.

Last but not least, when the Maltese language association organises meetings for the media to discuss the Maltese language, more political party media personnel presence would be appreciated.

## **Transport Malta**

Needless to say, that the lack of road standards are a minus for tourism in general and more specifically sports tourism as well as a negative when attracting high end foreign property investors.

The implementation of a national electrical vehicle charging stations network, where there would be more electrical vehicle charging stations all around the island. One correspondent said that this project was promoted in the media a few months ago, but was never implemented in practice.

A proposal was forwarded to us, to create an eco-friendly wooden cycle lane from Bugibba to Sliema all along the rocks on the coast road in a way which is environmentally sustainable as a means to promote health and fitness and cycling to and from various points in Malta and Gozo. The proposal mentioned the importance to create transport systems which are safer for cyclists, systems which manage to bypass the local traffic system which is still considered as far too dangerous due to the lack of respect by local drivers towards persons on two wheels.

