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TAKING THE LISBON STRATEGY FORWARD: LAUNCHING THE SECOND PUBLIC CONSULTATION STAGE OF THE NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMME 2005-2008

The Minister for Competitiveness and Communications, the Hon. Censu Galea, today launched the second public consultation stage of the National Reform Programme 2005-2008, which is intended to address Malta's competitiveness in terms of the EU's Lisbon Agenda. The purpose of this first draft National Reform Programme, presented today in the *Public Consultation Document*, is to set out a comprehensive strategy to deliver economic growth, to contribute towards Europe's goal of becoming the most competitive global bloc and to foster job creation. The National Reform Programme identifies priorities for action, and proposes policy initiatives and measures to achieve these goals.

The Cabinet Committee on Competitiveness has been tasked with the aim of promoting Malta's economic development and has been given the responsibility to provide a focused and cohesive coordination of all processes leading to the Lisbon Strategy including drawing up the National Reform Programme. To this effect, the Cabinet Committee on Competitiveness has entrusted the Management Efficiency Unit (MEU) to coordinate the development of the National Reform Programme for Malta with the Ministry for Competitiveness and Communications, the other line Ministries, the public sector and with all other stakeholders with the aim of addressing Malta's proposals for each of the 24 guidelines that form the skeleton of the Lisbon Strategy.

Approach to developing the National Reform Programme

Minister Censu Galea said that the *National Reform Programme - Public Consultation Document* is the product of discussions and analyses within the public service and public sector. Work included:

- a thorough review of all Government strategic reports, stakeholder documents and feedback received on the EU Lisbon Strategy guidelines;
- a number of meetings between the NRP Coordination Team within the Management Efficiency Unit and all Ministries and public sector organisations;
- a conference, entitled "*Taking the Lisbon Strategy Forward*", jointly organised by the Ministry for Competitiveness and Communications and the NRP Coordination Team within MEU, launched the first public consultation with social partners and civil society;

- a one-day technical meeting with a European Commission delegation which discussed broad and specific matters related to Malta's National Reform Programme;
- analysis, refinement and consolidation of line Ministry proposals and preparation of the *Public Consultation Document* that was discussed both within the Cabinet Committee on Competitiveness and Cabinet.

The second public consultation stage of the National Reform Programme

This document launches the second public consultation stage of the National Reform Programme which will take place between the 30th August and the 23rd September 2005. It is intended to have the widest consultation possible at all levels, with interested stakeholders and government entities, to provide feedback on the potential measures discussed herein as well as to develop other concrete initiatives that can be taken to achieve the Lisbon targets and Malta's key priorities.

During this public consultation period, the MEU NRP Coordination team intends to hold meetings with social partners and civil society. All feedback received will be analysed and factored in the prioritisation and selection of the ultimate NRP measures which should form part of the final draft National Reform Programme. The final draft National Reform Programme will then be subject to the approval of the Cabinet Committee on Competitiveness and Cabinet prior to eventual submission to the European Commission.

The National Reform Programme priorities

The Minister pointed out that the principal aim of the *National Reform Programme - Public Consultation Document* is to provide a wide range of possibilities that could be considered for adoption by the social partners, civil society and anyone interested in contributing towards achieving the aforementioned objectives. It must be pointed out that Government will only commit itself to any of the proposals put forward following a thorough examination of the feedback received during the consultation period and an evaluation of their implications. The opinions expressed in the *Public Consultation Document* do not represent Government's views but are those which have been formulated by the NRP Co-ordination team.

The National Reform Programme constitutes one of three key strategic documents setting out Government's agenda for the coming years, the other two being: "*A Better Quality of Life*", the Pre-Budget Document to the 2006 Budget which takes as the basis of its vision a five year timeframe (2006-2010), and the *National Strategic Reference Framework*, which will outline the strategic priorities for Objective 1 structural funds from the EU for the period 2007-2013.

Any national strategy needs to consolidate upon the country's strengths and competencies that permit it to seize new opportunities that could further contribute towards the country's competitive advantage, whilst at the same time, taking the necessary measures to mitigate, and where possible redress any weaknesses and threats. Another important aspect of such a strategy would be to ensure that the quality of life and social inclusion are also improved and to secure against a deterioration of such aspects at the expense of economic and competitive

regeneration. The *National Reform Programme- Public Consultation Document* addresses five priority areas through a number of proposals:

- sustainability of public finances;
- competitiveness;
- employment;
- education; and
- environment.

This National Reform Programme is meant to foster a unilateral front between Government, the social partners and civil society in the single goal of making Malta a more competitive nation that preserves its values and support network, and that acts as a beacon as to where the country should aim to be in three years time. It is therefore essential to ensure a participative debate amongst all stakeholders in order to identify those measures on which we should all focus to achieve our aims.

Distribution and consultation feedback

A copy of the *National Reform Programme – Public Consultation Document* can be collected from either the:

Management Efficiency Unit
12, St Paul's Street
Valletta

Or

Ministry for Competitiveness and Communications
Casa Leoni
St Joseph High Road
St Venera

The *National Reform Programme – Public Consultation Document* is also available online on www.mcmp.gov.mt or www.meu.gov.mt.

Feedback on the *National Reform Programme – Public Consultation Document* is to be sent by post to: The NRP Coordinator, Management Efficiency Unit, 12 St Paul's Street, Valletta VLT 07 or by email to nrp.meu@gov.mt by Friday 23rd September 2005.

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