

The Future of Europe discussed in Gozo

The third in a series of discussions on the Future of Europe was held in the hall of the Xewkija Primary School in Gozo with representatives from the Gozo community, namely the Gozo Business Chamber, Europe Direct Gozo, the Gozo Regional Committee, the Gozo Regional Development Authority, NGOs representing the environment, cultural heritage, young people and the LGBTI+ community.

Servizzi Ewropej F'Malta and the Ministry in the Office of the Prime Minister hosted the discussion to enable people from different sectors to take part and put forward their opinions, ideas and suggestions on different aspects they would like the European Union to address in the coming years.

As remarked by Carmelo Abela, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, in his pre-recorded intervention, by having such discussions in Gozo, Gozitans can present the challenges they face daily and provide their own aspirations for the future of Europe. "No one is in a better position than you to speak about the challenges and opportunities faced by the Gozitan communities in the daily life", said Minister Abela.

CEO of SEM Mandy Falzon opened the discussion by remarking that the main aim of this Conference is to provide a space where citizens can voice their daily challenges and put forward any ideas and suggestions on the future of Europe. Citizens have the opportunity to actively participate in this Conference not only by attending activities such as this, but also by providing their feedback through a [Multilingual Digital Platform](#) developed specifically for the Conference.

A common sentiment among all those present was that the European Union needs to heed more the concerns and difficulties faced by islands and island regions by moving away from a 'one size fits all' approach. Instead, it should focus on an approach that caters for the needs and realities of the respective regions across the Union, especially insular regions such as Gozo.

The ideas and suggestions that were raised during this discussion reflected this common sentiment of participants:

- The European Union needs to be more grounded in its approach towards regions. The European Parliament, as the only European Institution elected by citizens, should be further strengthened to ensure that the citizens and the realities of the regions they inhabit are continuously represented at a European level.
- More needs to be done by the European Union to counter-react the insularity of regions such as Gozo especially with respect to regional development and economic growth.



- Economic development in Gozo should no longer be measured by the Gross Domestic Product per capita, as this does not provide a realistic picture of the situation. This stems for example from the fact that companies in Gozo are registered in Malta and therefore, their profits are also registered in Malta. The Regional Development Authority in Gozo is currently undertaking an exercise aimed at addressing this issue so that development in Gozo can be compared more realistically with that in Malta and with the average in the European Union.
- The European Union should allow for specific concessions on VAT to be available to regions. Such a concession has already been given to islands in Greece to adopt a different VAT system from that of the mainland.
- Need for genuine consultation of regional stakeholders with the national Government when preparing plans for large-scale, national projects to be submitted to the EU. The plans for the projects related to the Recovery and Resilience Facility were mentioned as a typical example. The European Union should introduce a mechanism that ensures effective and genuine dialogue between regional stakeholders and national authorities prior to submission and approval of national plans to the EU.
- In the field of youth, the European Union should seek to mainstream youth policy across all policy areas to ensure that youths are not left behind. In line with this, decisions-makers at all levels need to not only hear the voices of young people but actively listen and act on their opinions and ideas.
- Small regional youth NGOs feel that they are marginalised by the EU especially in comparison to larger regional organisations. It is suggested that a European framework composed solely of small youth organisations is set up. This would allow them to voice their common concerns and interests and ensure that their voice is not lost among the larger organisations.
- The European Union should continue to promote and incentivise small scale regional initiatives and activities that involve the participation of citizens. Through such initiatives the EU can have a direct and tangible impact on the daily lives of its citizens.
- To ensure that the heritage and traditions of regions are not lost, the European Union should increase funding opportunities through small funding schemes that focus on Vocational Education and Training (VET) for the promotion of artisanal work.

The ideas and suggestions put forward during these national discussions will be included in a national consolidated report and presented to the Conference, which is planned to come to a close on Europe Day - May 9 this year.

