

THURSDAY, 13TH NOVEMBER 2003

NO. 1367

**INAUGURAL SPEECH BY THE HON EDDIE FENECH ADAMI,
PRIME MINISTER, AT THE FOURTH eFORESEE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE HOSTED BY THE MALTA COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY, AT THE HOTEL CORINTHIA SAN GORG – ST.
JULIAN’S - THURSDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2003**

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all today to the Fourth eForesee International Conference hosted by the Malta Council for Science and Technology.

The global aim of this Conference is to explore potential areas for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of research and innovation. The need for an exploratory discussion at this stage is clear: the drivers of competitiveness, research and innovation need to be directed by the best possible synergy between policy approaches, both on a national and on a regional level – by regional I am referring here to three different perspectives, that is sub-national, European and Euro-Mediterranean.

The “open coordination” approach being encouraged by the European Union addresses this rationale. It intends to improve Europe’s global competitiveness through a closer integration of research and innovation policies within the Member States. The successful development of the European Research and Innovation Area depends on the extent to which the related visions and policies of the Member States, as well as the acceding states who will join the Union next year, can converge and benefit from mutual learning.

Investing wisely in research and innovation has become a critical preoccupation for governments worldwide. In Europe, within current budgetary constraints, efforts are being made to develop realistic strategies with the aim of meeting the Lisbon target of three percent Gross Domestic Product spent on Research and Development by 2010.

Given these commitments, my Government is acutely aware of the need to benchmark and coordinate Malta’s policies in this area with those of the other Acceding and Member States, while ensuring at the same time that our national concerns and priorities are not compromised. Current preoccupations relate to

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the need to review and streamline government spending and subsidies and to reduce the national budget deficit to a sustainable level. A viable pensions policy and the need to improve productivity and efficiency are other major targets, since Malta can no longer compete, and indeed does not wish to compete, on the basis of cheap labour costs.

My Government is fully aware that the achievement of these economic and social goals depends to a significant degree on incorporating a sustained programme of research and development within Malta's economic activity. The pace of change in today's global economy demands this. In this light, we also believe that the best means of ensuring a sustainable and effective outcome lies with the Union's initiatives aimed at developing appropriate European and national R & D strategies within a systematic and comprehensive framework.

In this context, Foresight is increasingly being recognised as a highly effective tool for encouraging wider stakeholder involvement at both a local and regional level, as well as for providing open, participatory fora for consultation and discussion. Foresight helps to stimulate an ongoing process of policy formulation and development that alerts policy-makers to the critical policy concerns and relevant strategic intelligence.

Governments need to develop clearer visions of science, technology and innovation futures upon which to base policies and strategies. For policy-makers, Foresight can be an indispensable tool for exploring and defining the feasible future scenarios – feasible not only in the sense that they are economically achievable, but more importantly, in ensuring that they are socially acceptable.

Of course, the long-term dimension of Foresight is often at loggerheads with the short three, four or five year time frames of elected Government. However, in my view this only underscores the need for such exercises to ensure long-term sustainable policy approaches. Foresight has an important calibrating and structuring role to play, not only in designing socially acceptable policies at a domestic level, but also in creating an effective balance between national concerns, priorities and European policy challenges.

A further benefit of Foresight is the role it can play as an important interface or bridging function between different interests. This aspect is particularly relevant to my Government's opinion that the most significant national economic and social issues are most effectively addressed through a dialogue

between the representatives of organised civil society. For example, in Malta, Foresight can help to bridge the gap between the public and private sectors. Foresight can also play an important role in managing the Malta-EU interface, in terms of synchronising the visions and policy approaches of the individual Member States and the European Union institutions.

Ownership is a key issue here. We are all entitled to our individual visions and approaches – this is an important principle in a democratic country. However, if we are striving to be competitive, we need to combine our efforts and bring coherence to our policy strategies. Foresight helps to draw out the overlaps and common interests that are so vital in pursuing joint strategies.

This attribute is particularly relevant at this point in time, faced as we are with the imminent prospect of the EU's enlargement. May 2004 marks a major transition, not

only for new members, but also for the existing Member States and the European Union as a whole. Managing this transition effectively is a prime policy implementation concern. This relates to what happens within the enlarged European Union and equally to relations with the rest of the world, in particular, in Malta's case, with our immediate neighbours in the Mediterranean.

The EU enlargement will have a major impact on the economies of the neighbouring countries and, as a result, on their economic and trade links with the European Union. Malta, with its central location in the Mediterranean and at the southern periphery of the enlarged European Union, is in a particularly privileged position to understand the concerns, needs and aspirations of its southern neighbours.

As a new member of the EU, Malta is keen to encourage the development of more systematic policy approaches, such as Foresight, to fully exploit the potential of Euro-Mediterranean collaborative futures. It is for this reason that this Conference regarding eForesee is being accorded high priority by my Government.

There are a number of challenging sectors where the Euro-Med collaborative futures can be pursued. A prime example is the marine sector. Malta has in the past played an important role in the United Nations in promoting the Common

Heritage of Mankind Principle; an initiative with very similar characteristics to Foresight that aims to protect the marine heritage for future generations.

The European Science Foundation recently flagged an initiative to promote the establishment of a European Marine Research Area. The European Strategy Forum had also stressed the “strategic and economic importance of the European marine resource” and the “need to coordinate and plan better the use of existing marine RTD infrastructures and to identify and plan co-ordination for future needs”.

The rationale is clear - optimising efficiency of infrastructures, pooling and sharing of ideas, learning from best practice and stimulating increased opportunities for emerging Science and Technology developments. The same rationale applies to the development of a Euro-Mediterranean Marine Research Area. This idea is not meant to pre-empt or steer your discussion – it is simply an example of what comes to mind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that this Conference will be very productive and will guide us all towards developing a long-term agenda for driving Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the fields of research and innovation, both of which are vital to our economic and social futures. I look forward to the outcomes and the recommendations from this distinguished gathering.

I wish you every success with your work and an enjoyable stay in Malta.

DOI – 13.11.2003