Council for Maltese Living Abroad

Meeting held in Valletta, Malta 18-19 September 2012

Summary of Issues raised by Council Members
Listed by Topic

The following is a summary of the issues raised by Council members attending the Advisory Council meeting. For a full text of the presentations in Maltese refer to the relevant article published on the FMLA website.

Presented by:
- Prof. Maurice Cauchi and Dr Edwin Borg-Manché – Australia (Victoria)
- Mr Gaetano Pace and Mr Lawrence Dimech – Australia (NSW)
- Mr Bernard Scerri – UK
- Mr Joe Sherri – Canada
- Mr Louis J Vella and Mr Larry Zahra – USA
- Mr Franklin Mamo – Europe
- Mr Frank Scicluna – Other States of Australia, excluding Victoria & NSW

Maltese language maintenance

- Teaching Maltese at secondary level (VCE in Victoria, Year 12 exam) is at risk because of lack of student participation. Required further help to attract students (and teachers at this level) – (Victoria)
- This is a topic of great concern. Students should not be asked to pay money to attend Maltese language schools. Perhaps one could investigate the possibility of applying for funds from the EU for this purpose? (NSW)
- Language and culture: Maltese language school in Canberra had to close for lack of students. Perth is also likely to follow. In Adelaide there are several problems. We are finding it difficult to have 15 students to sit for the Year 12 exam in Maltese. Three states have only one qualified teacher. After 2013 Maltese will not remain on the list of languages which can be offered at this level, thus losing identity and respect it deserves. (Other Australia)
- There are no facilities for teaching Maltese in the UK. A detailed document relating to this has been prepared by Bernard Scerri. (UK)
- In Toronto two small Maltese language classes are held on Saturdays and they are run by the Metropolitan Separate School Board (MSSB). There is also an Adult Maltese Language Class that is held on Wednesdays and run on a voluntary basis. A special effort is required to interest children to learn and practice the Maltese language (Canada)
- Required schools, to teach Maltese language, language, culture, history, tradition and folklore to children of Maltese parents living abroad when these visit Malta. (USA)
Many elderly Maltese find it difficult to understand or read modern Maltese, especially in newspapers. How to tackle this phenomenon? (USA)

Culture

- Maltese associations have always helped maintain culture through organisation of literary evenings, festas, commemorations, etc. Many bands have been created. It is suggested that help should be available to encourage bilateral exchange of persons to encourage Maltese abroad to keep abreast of Maltese activities. (NSW)
- Many schools organise ‘multicultural days’, where students prepare traditional food and talk about their country of origin. In the UK a packet has been prepared relating to traditional Maltese customs, Maltese flag, some Maltese products, food recipes as well as short power-point presentation in Maltese. We require help in obtaining costumes, posters and other ways of promoting our activities. (UK)
- In Canada there are several organisations dedication to socialising. There is also a church (St Paul’s Church) under MSSP fathers. Number of Maltese attending both of these is becoming less. Attendance was better when we used to bring performers from Malta but these days we cannot afford this. (Canada)

Taxation of Maltese living abroad

- The rate of income tax paid by Maltese living abroad is much more punitive than that paid by a resident in Malta. In fact, there is no distinction between a Maltese citizen living abroad and a total stranger. It is suggested that changes in Income Tax law should be made to remove this discriminatory clause. (Victoria)

Study and Work Experience in the EU for Maltese living abroad

- Required government assistance for access to study and work opportunities for young people of Maltese background to work in the EU, possibly by reserving a couple of positions for youth of Maltese background. (Victoria)

Biometric passports

- The introduction of biometric passports has created insuperable difficulties for those living away from the major cities. The result is that many Maltese living abroad have decided not to apply for, or renew, their Maltese passport. It is essential for portable equipment to be made available at regular intervals in places where huge distances makes it impracticable to attend personally at centres which currently provide the service. (Victoria).
- Major problem for those living long distances away, often involving a two-day journey. (NSW)
- Problems of distance for those not living in Canberra, Melbourne or Sydney where passports can be organised, especially bearing in mind that many applicants for renewal of passports are the elderly and include the sick and disabled. (Other Australia)
- Some say that it is easier to go to Malta rather than London to renew a Maltese passport. Solution seems to be to organise a mobile service that visits various cities on a regular basis. (UK)
Apart from Toronto, there are many Maltese, many of them elderly, living in other provinces, who have to travel by train or plane to obtain a biometric passport. Suggest regular visits to obviate the need for this travel. (Canada)

Centres where biometric passports can be organised are available in Washington, DC and New York. This creates great difficulties for Maltese living elsewhere in the US. Most Maltese live in Michigan and California. (USA)

Citizens’ Rights

- Required clarification between the rights of citizens and those of residents, especially in relation to differences in concessions for elderly, travel, etc. (Victoria)
- Many citizens have expressed disappointment about the fact that without an identity card, a number of problems might arise. It has been suggested that a temporary identity card might be considered for persons of Maltese background visiting Malta. (Victoria)
- When travelling to Malta, Maltese are asked for an identity card if they go to hospital or board a bus. Can non-resident identity cards (temporary) be issued to these people? (Canada)

Student cards

- Student cards for students visiting Malta to enable them to visit museums and other institutions of cultural interest to encourage youth of Maltese background to maintain their culture.

Seniors’ Card

- There should be recognition of the Seniors Card issued from the country of residence to be equivalent to “Kartanzjan” in Malta, as is the practice in most other EU countries. (Victoria)

Elderly

- Loss of acquired (English) language often occurs as one grows older. Interpreters are required for patients in hospital, persons in homes for the elderly, as well from law and other authorities. We should try to encourage individuals and small groups to make themselves available for this purpose by providing incentives and recognition. (UK)
- A small number of elderly persons express the wish to retire to nursing homes in Malta. Required investigation into the possibility of facilitating such a scheme. (Victoria)
- Currently many members of the family have to look after their ageing parents. With aging there is an increase in medical needs. More and more elderly parents are being put in Seniors’ Homes or Long Term Facilities. We find these persons become more attached to Malta. It would be good if these people had access to information about Malta and what is happening among the Maltese communities in Canada. (Canada)

Youth

- While proud of being Maltese, few make the effort to learn Maltese. Some efforts have been made to set up Social Clubs where they could meet, but none have succeeded. While we believe that there is considerable talent among them, we have
found it difficult to interest them to be of assistance to the Maltese community in Canada. (Canada)

- Encouragement for youth to become involved within activities of Maltese abroad. A mechanism needs to be created to encourage youth of Maltese background to take a more active part within the Maltese communities abroad. (Victoria)
- Suggesting a study to see how other communities are dealing with the problem of culture maintenance among youth. In Victoria one such group (Generation AusMalts) wish to make contact with similar groups. (Victoria)
- Difficulties in attracting youth. Sporting activities is accepted as the best way to attract youth. Encourage youth to become involved and participate under the Maltese flag. (NSW)

Role of the Cultural Institute

- Details relating on how the setting up of such an institute is going to affect Maltese living abroad at a local level remain to be worked out. (Victoria).

Radio and Television

- There is a need for provision of television programs of good quality in Maltese to be used as part and parcel of the multi-national television programs overseas, particularly for elderly persons with little knowledge of English language. (Victoria)
- There are no Maltese radio, television, journals or other methods of communication in the UK. Emails and other networks are useful for younger Maltese but not the older ones. There is a need for regular slots in the Maltese media where associations can advertise their activities. In addition there is a need for the creation of a radio station for Maltese living abroad, transmitted on internet from Malta. An online journal might also be useful. (UK)

Delays in postal distribution

- Complaints have been made regarding the length of time taken for letters from Malta to reach Australia. Required investigation as to the reason for this (whether the problem is in Malta or overseas). (Victoria)

Planning the next convention for Maltese living abroad

- Plans should be set in motion to have the Conventions for Maltese living abroad every 5 years. (Victoria) : Note. This suggestion has already been set in motion, and the next Convention is planned for 2015. (Victoria)

Information about Maltese Laws

- Maltese visiting Malta stay for weeks and should not be considered as “tourists”. They should be classified as temporary residents. We believe that Maltese visiting Malta should have all the rights enjoyed by all Maltese living in Malta. In particular, this Council should deal with legislation relating to wills, general powers of attorney, transfer of property, etc. where there are great differences between legislation in Malta and those overseas (eg Australia). Maltese living abroad should have adequate information about Maltese laws to be in a position to make the right decisions. (NSW)

Inheritance
• When problems arise relating to inheritance, Maltese living abroad have to hire a Maltese lawyer, paid by them, to look after their interests. Can the Maltese Government appoint lawyers to protect the interests of these citizens? (Canada)

• Required distinction between ‘Nutar’ in Malta and ‘Notary Public’ in the US. Use of certain signatures and Apostilles [Definition: “Additional authentication required for international acceptance of notarized documents”] on some documents especially those required for sale of property and wills in Malta. (USA)

Information

• Setting up of a website for the Council which should contain more information about current affairs & cultural programs. The SBS program in Australia is very short (often no more than 20 minutes). The only Maltese newspaper, The Maltese Herald is likely to stop publication: this has been the only paper in Australia. Use of electronic means of transfer of information is recommended. (NSW)

The Banking Sector

• There is only one branch of BOV in Australia (situated in Melbourne). Many Maltese who use these services have not being adequately served. One should study carefully how these services should be upgraded, perhaps in the light of the economics of Australia/Europe. (NSW)

Travel

• We feel that the possibility of setting up direct flights between Malta and Australia (as used to be the case in the past) should be investigated. (NSW)

Consular Services

• Names on passports and other documents: Essential to ensure that the name on a passport etc should reflect the current use of the name by the holder of the document, and not an Italianised name as shown on the birth certificate. (NSW)

• Problems re certificates (birth, marriage, etc) where the names are different from the usual names used by the holders of the passport. (USA)

European Union

• Information and education about laws, rights, benefits etc as issued by the EU are not available in Australia. It is a pity that none of the six Maltese Members of the European Parliament have visited the Maltese Community in Australia. (NSW)

Other Issues

• Citizenship applications: These are taking a very long time to process.

• Distance-related problems: Maltese in the UK are scatted all over the country in small concentrations. Possibility of subsidies for transport to attend activities and functions. (UK)

• A Centre for the Maltese Community in the UK: In the UK there are no Maltese centres. A Centre is sorely needed. Perhaps funds could be found from EU sources in addition to donations from the community in order to keep alive Maltese culture. (UK)

Pensions
• As there is still no bilateral agreement between Malta and the US many Maltese living in the US find it difficult to acquire certain pension benefits (which do not exist in Australia and Canada where there are bilateral agreements). (USA)

Tourism

• Required material from the Board of Tourism to encourage tourists to visit Malta. (Canada)

National Feasts

• Uniquely, Malta has five national feasts and many Maltese are confused when these are. Suggest that the 8th of September should be recognised as the National Day for Malta, while the other four would remain as non-national feasts. (Other Australia)

Right to vote

• Maltese in Europe may be considered as ‘expatriates’, a recent category which is different from other categories of Maltese living abroad. (Europe)

• Malta has one of strictest criteria among EU countries, requiring citizen, resident in Malta for 6 out of the last 18 months with only minor exceptions, but excluding students and others who are absent only temporarily. (Europe)

• Interpretation of “residence” ie the physical and continued presence in a place: this could lead to loss of voting rights. It is suggested that this category of Maltese should be considered as exceptions and allowed voting rights. (Europe)

• Eligibility for voting for members of the European Parliament should be the same as that for the Chamber of Deputies. All Maltese wherever they live in the world should be eligible for voting. If necessary, voting by power of attorney should be introduced. (Europe)