

Business Today

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Social partners in talks to bridge positions on Budget

Karl Stagno-Navarra

Social partners are reportedly holding informal meetings between themselves in a bid to reach an agreement on positions to be forwarded to government before next month's budget.

Trade unions, employers and industrialists have admitted to have been holding talks for the past three weeks, while none expressed a desire to reveal the details of the proposals they are seeking to put to government. This is the first time social partners

seem to be working together since the collapse in talks over a proposed Social Pact in 2005.

"What is being discussed is not the Social Pact, although many points in our discussions edge closer towards a sort of pact between us," said an informed source.

An MCESD meeting that was scheduled to have been held last Friday was postponed to another date, and talks are to continue between the social partners until another date is announced.

Tomorrow, Thursday, the Employers Association (MEA) is expected to publish a survey that was compiled by its members about the impact of a €5 to €6 per week increase in salaries would have next year should the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) be implemented.

Sources close to the MEA have revealed that the results are "shocking" and added that should such an increase be imposed on employers to make good for this year's record inflation, "then mass redundancies are expected,"

particularly in the manufacturing and the tourism sectors.

Although conscious about the severe problems employers are facing at the moment, trade union representatives are adamant on their position that workers cannot be left to face inflation without any compensation, even though they agree that this year's record inflation was government induced given the hefty increase in energy tariffs.

Statistics published this week revealed the state of play in the

Maltese economy with manufacturing sales registering a drop of almost €120 million to €456.4 million, €323.8 million of which consisted of exports.

The National Statistics Office (NSO) said this was mainly due to a drop in demand in the communication, chemical, rubber, plastic, electrical, metal, medical, precision and optical sectors.

As a result, employment fell by 1,136 to 16,352 and investment by €13.3 million to €21 million.

Tecom top brass complain of visa problems

Malta cannot be gateway to EU if we don't address this issue – Vince Farrugia

Matthew Vella

High officials from the Smart City's parent company Tecom told a Maltese business delegation last week of their frustrations at month-long waits to acquire a visa to travel to Malta.

A business delegation to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, led by President George Abela, heard how Tecom representatives had to wait for over three weeks to be given a visa to travel to Malta.

Tecom are seeking to invest millions in its internet village being developed at Ricasoli, despite speculation on its progress following

the international recession and industrial slowdown.

The director of the Chamber of Malta SMEs, Vince Farrugia, who accompanied Abela on the tour of the Arabian peninsula, said making Malta a gateway to the EU for these countries would require addressing the visa 'problem'.

"If we want to establish Malta as their 'passport to the EU', we have to address the matter. It was the crudest thing that emerged from these discussions. Dubai has visa problems when it comes to entering the EU. Top businessmen told us they waited for a month to get their visa. I

was shocked to hear these people are investing millions in Malta and still have visa problems," Farrugia said.

The highlight of the delegation's visit was to Qatar, an Arab emirate bordered by Saudi Arabia to the south, but surrounded by the Persian Gulf. An oil-rich nation, Qatar has the second highest GDP per capita in the world and has been ruled by the absolute monarchy of the al-Thani family since the mid-1800s.

"It was very positive. George Abela proved himself to be very charismatic when it comes to investment and export promotion. He has the ▶ page 5



President George Abela, accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Tonio Borg, meet CEO of Tecom Investments, Dubai Internet City, Abdullatif Al Mulla.

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Markets

Security	Closing Prices in Euro Tue 25-August-09	Closing Prices in Euro Tue 01-September-09	% Change from previous wk
Bank of Valletta p.l.c.	3.000	3.000	0.000%
HSBC Bank Malta p.l.c.	2.800	2.700	-3.571%
Lombard Bank p.l.c.	2.550	2.550	0.000%
Middlesea Insurance p.l.c.	1.759	1.759	0.000%
Simonds Farsons Cisk p.l.c.	1.680	1.680	0.000%
GO p.l.c.	1.800	1.800	0.000%
I.H.I. p.l.c.	0.841	0.841	0.000%
Plaza Centres p.l.c.	1.649	1.649	0.000%
FIMBank p.l.c. (US\$)	\$1.289	\$1.289	0.000%
Malta International Airport p.l.c.	2.350	2.200	-6.383%
GlobalCapital p.l.c.	1.500	1.500	0.000%
Datatrak Holdings p.l.c.	0.190	0.190	0.000%
San Tumas Shareholdings p.l.c.	3.200	3.040	-5.000%
Medserv p.l.c.	3.545	3.500	-1.269%
Grand Harbour Marina p.l.c.	1.980	1.980	0.000%
6pm Holdings p.l.c. (GBP)	£0.590	£0.590	0.000%
Crimsonwing p.l.c.	0.390	0.390	0.000%
MaltaPost p.l.c.	0.690	0.690	0.000%
RS2 Software p.l.c.	0.600	0.599	-0.167%