

**Speech delivered by Anthony F. Camilleri, President of KSU at the opening
of the academic year 2005-6
University of Malta, Tal-Qroqq – October 2005**

Before starting, I would like to ask you all to rise and observe a few moments silence to commemorate the lives of our friends and colleagues Fabio, Marco, Oswaldo, Christian and David who died tragically in a car accident on Saturday.

You will be sorely missed. Our thoughts and good will prayers go to your families.

My fellow students,

On behalf of myself, KSU, the associations on campus, and the entire student population, it is my distinct pleasure to heartily bid you WELCOME! While you sit through this morning's ceremonies, I suggest you savour the moment, for today you start the best and most determining period of your lives. Today you sit here as teenagers free as the wind. In a few years you will leave here, as competent professionals, trained experts in your field, ready for employment, marriage, a home or whatever else you choose to make of life. This university is not a collection of buildings or even of people. It is a cauldron where one throws in the ingredients of some hard work, a tad of skill, a great deal of time – a magic mixture which can transform you and your life into anything you want it to be.

Of course, its still way too early for me to harp on as if you're about to graduate and I should and will address the concerns you are currently harbouring. Four days ago, the Ministry of Education treated most of you to a surprise by announcing a change to your stipend. For some of you the change was a breath of fresh air, but for the rest of you, it was distinctly unpleasant. What you may not realize, is that a full year and a half before you entered university, KSU had already been working tirelessly to secure the best possible

package for you. Considering that one of the first proposals would have had you paying back all your stipend when you graduate, and furthermore paying tuition fees, I think you would agree we've persuaded government to make a very considerable policy reversal.

Does that mean that KSU is going to do nothing about your stipend? Are we going to sit around doing nothing, ignorant of your concerns and your hardships. Of course not, every person in KSU has dedicated at least a year of his life to the express purpose of representing students, and that is exactly what we will do. 2 hours after the announcement regarding your stipends, we responded by press conference with our initial reactions. 2 days later a survey team was working out of our offices to take your impressions so we could formulate the way forward. We convinced the Hon. Dr. Louis Galea Minister of Education, to come and sit before you on Thursday to answer to your concerns personally. Today, I am in a position to say that you have confirmed our course of action. Over the past few days several individuals and associations have tried to gain their 15 minutes of fame by using your problems to their political or other advantage. Lots of people have come forward to say what, in their knowledgeable opinion, KSU should or shouldn't do. However, my question to them is, since when is KSU there to serve their interests, rather than yours? Since when do they expect KSU to put them, and their political games before your wellbeing? Just in case we haven't been clear enough in the past, let me be clear today: I tell those people "you don't have a hope". KSU is a body run by students, for students and I renew our pledge as well as my personal promise that we will tirelessly serve your interests and ONLY your interests as long as we are in office.

Will KSU lead you out into the streets to protest against these changes? In our independently conducted survey carried out over the weekend, three in four of you asked us to pursue other avenues, and that is exactly what we will do. Rather than taking the easy route, we will be going back to the negotiating table

for another round of arduous talks. On the agenda this time: securing additional funding for university, the setup of proper national quality assurance structures, the composition of a National Higher Education Commission, and committing the government to put significant funding into the scholarship and graduate loan schemes just announced. The government has chosen to reduce our support while trumping that it will do everything possible to make sure every one of us reaches our full potential. Our answer to that is that the least they can do is to give our education the priority it deserves by putting real money into our facilities, our staff and our future.

For those of you who still need information about the changes, our stipends@ksu.org.mt hotline is still running. As of tomorrow morning we will be manning a stage on this stand where we will be available to help, to advise and most importantly to just introduce ourselves, chat and get to know you a little bit better.

When you do, you'll have to excuse us if we ramble on about student life on campus at the University of Malta, but the student life here is truly unique. As you may have noticed from the myriad of different stands surrounding this area there are quite a few associations based here on campus. Whatever your interest, be it politics, environment, religion, travel, sports or anything else you can find an association or club attuned to your interest. My appeal to you is not to spend your time here only on academic interests. From my personal experience, I can guarantee that volunteering within student associations gives you a sense of personal fulfillment and all round achievement that can be felt nowhere else. It also completes an already rich CV with exactly the work experience for that extra something that will give you the edge over the competition when you need it. Whether organizing events, creating policy or even just going to parties and reading magazines, BE ACTIVE. It is this that which turns your time at university into one of life's defining moments rather than just a dull, mundane, full-time job which you don't get paid for.

If you look left and right you are likely to find several persons of different nationalities sitting in your row. I am addressing you in English, which is a break from tradition, however in spirit of our institution's new status as a regional university I felt it appropriate to deliver a speech which could be understood by all of you. On campus you will find an international culture which is hard to match. Those of you who were born here, be sure to mingle with and befriend students from the wealth of cultures you'll be exposed to. To all you international students, make Maltese friends, learn some of our language and traditions and go home with great stories about the hospitality you are sure to find in our small Mediterranean island.

Academically speaking, you can rightly have pride in the institution you study at. The origins of this university date back over 300 years, and as you might imagine, with such a veritable history it has built up quite an international reputation for excellence. Courses here are of very good quality, lecturers are generally friendly, competent and efficient while the degrees are well recognized. Providing you are willing to do your part as a student, which of course means respecting the education you will be given and study appropriately, you should breeze through here seamlessly. Of course problems can and do arise, and whenever such happens feel free to come by our offices where you're sure to find more than just a sympathetic ear. In fact our education commission are specially trained and experienced with solving problems as amicably as possible with university authorities. There are however, a couple of issues which I feel is my obligation to once again publicly bring to the same authorities' attention. Honourable Rector, students who applied for a revision of paper from the June session have again received them after the resit session was completed. Also, the number of students from the Faculty of Economics, Management Accountancy who were allowed to benefit from ERASMUS can literally be counted on the fingers of one hand. I urge you to look into these matters with exigency and correct these matters that are seriously concerning the students of your university. I have the fullest confidence that you will do your best to assist

every student here as you have always done. On a slightly different note, albeit a few days late, allow me to convey to the best of birthday wishes and augur that the coming year will be as successful for you as the last.

I'm not going to bore everyone with an interminable monologue about how you are the leaders of tomorrow, the future and so on and so forth. Taking your capabilities and potential as granted, the real question to ask is what are you going to do with them? Malta is currently going through a period of unprecedented change, with rapid economic, political and social restructuring. Maltese students are amongst the most active in Europe when it comes to voluntary organizations, yet unfortunately it is clear to all that when in these matters, we have become more quiet in recent years.

As university students, and as individuals receiving our education courtesy of the public purse, we have an obligation to take an active role within civic society. In the past, it has students who have come to society's rescue when political regimes were unjust or when the people felt oppressed. Thankfully, those days are over, but it is no reason to sit on our loins and enjoy the good life. There are so many issues out there where we could and should be playing a greater role in formulating society's opinion. Why don't we see students voicing themselves more vociferously about the issues concerning irregular immigration, about the goods or evils of globalization, wars around the world, social security reform or any of the other hundreds of issues that grip our nation daily? I am without doubt that we have strong, valid opinions on all of them, so why don't we voice them? So lets voice those opinions and voice them strongly, lets show all detractors that students DO care about this country. If the country needs competitiveness, lets ask them to look here, at our ideas, our creativity and our energy and then dare anyone to say that Malta does not have the right ingredients to be competitive.

Before I conclude, I augur that you enjoy the Freshers' Week we have prepared for you and pass a special word of thanks and congratulations to Malcolm Azzopardi and the rest of KSU's executive and helpers who have made it all possible. I would also like to invite you to Frisk - our Freshers' Party to be held in this quadrangle on Friday.

You are part of the student body. My last appeal to you is to remember that you are part of the student body. Singly, you are voice shouting in the wilderness yet together you can raise a firestorm. Our job is to funnel that energy so that you may make the best use of it, and it is a task we will perform gladly. Choose a cause, and make a difference.

Thank-you, once again welcome and good luck.