

# THE SUNDAY TIMES

Web Offset printed and published by Allied Newspapers Ltd, Strickland House, 341, St Paul Street, Valletta VLT 07. Postal address: PO Box 328, Valletta CMR 01. Tel. 2124-1464/5 or 2559-4500. Fax 2559-4510; e-mail: [sunday@timesofmalta.com](mailto:sunday@timesofmalta.com). Website: [www.timesofmalta.com](http://www.timesofmalta.com). Advertising: Tel. 2559-4200; fax 2123-9395; e-mail: [adverts@timesofmalta.com](mailto:adverts@timesofmalta.com); [display@timesofmalta.com](mailto:display@timesofmalta.com). One year's subscription: Lm18.20, not including hand delivery and postage.

Editor: Laurence Grech

DECEMBER 31, 2006

## Good year or bad?

"IT WAS the best of times, it was the worst of times" – the opening line of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* – could well be what a number of people in Malta feel about the year about to end, according to the latest *Sunday Times* survey.

Actually, for a relative majority – 40.3 per cent – 2006 was neither a good nor a bad year. However, for 36.7 per cent, it was a good year, and for a small minority, 1.7 per cent, a very good year. Those who dismissed it as a bad year were 20 per cent of those surveyed; for 1.3 per cent it was a very bad year.

These results, one suspects, hardly vary from one year to the next, since the question is how the year was for the respondents personally: it could have been influenced by serious illness, or death in the family, the loss of a job, or some other equally traumatic event. In fact, our second question sought to find out what kind of year it was for Malta as a whole.

The results were slightly different, with exactly one third saying it was a good year, and 2 per cent saying it was a very good year. For 41 per cent, it was neither a good nor a bad year for Malta; for 18.3 per cent and for 5.3 per cent, it was, respectively, a bad year and a very bad year.

The impact of high oil prices, reflected in higher water and electricity bills, not to mention the decline in tourism, no doubt influenced those who view 2006 as a negative year for Malta. Among those who judged the year positively, Government's improving financial situation (reflected in a positive Budget for 2007), the prospect of major projects taking off, and increased work opportunities must have been uppermost in their minds.

The survey tried to find out what was worrying Maltese society at the end of 2006. As we said earlier, the top two worries were the cost of living and the water and electricity bills. The reduction in the utility bills surcharge announced last week is undoubtedly welcome, but there is a feeling that high oil prices are here to stay. Further rises could wreak havoc with the rosier economic forecasts and would be most unwelcome in 2007, as Malta gears itself to join the Eurozone on January 1, 2008.

Predictably, illegal immigration (considering its social and economic costs) and unemployment also figured highly on the list of problems, as did "exaggerated taxation". Some of the other worries, though not as pronounced, are intriguing. For example, pensions were identified as a worry by 14.7 per cent of respondents. Does this mean that they were against raising the retirement age, or were they expressing fears that the current pension system was unsustainable? With drugs, identified as a problem by 8 per cent, the feeling is that people are worried about their spread and availability, rather than a feeling that the current laws need relaxing.

One has to say, though, that when asked specifically to say whether particular issues – such as the cost of medicines, the state of the roads, illegal immigrants, MEPA, low productivity among Government employees and lack of law enforcement – were a serious problem, the majority of respondents said they were. Only in three cases – public transport, wardens and health services – did less than half say they were a serious problem.

Naturally, the perception of what constitutes a serious problem and its extent depends on the socio-economic category, and even, presumably, the age of the respondent. Thus, for instance, while 70.4 per cent of those in the AB category (the highest) identified corruption as a serious problem, only 39.7 per cent of those in the DE category (the lowest) did so. The same with the crisis of values, which 70.4 per cent of ABs thought was a serious problem, but only half of DEs.

When it comes to judging efforts to tackle serious problems, the most negative judgment was reserved for MEPA and its workings. This is not surprising, given the controversial decisions taken on development projects, and also the perceived foot-dragging in issuing permits and anomalous or inconsistent decisions affecting ordinary individual applicants. Government's perceived failure to address other problems was most evident in the responses given regarding the costs of living, the cost of medicines, corruption, the behaviour of local wardens, the lack of law enforcement and the productivity of government employees.

The message is clear: if Government wants its citizens to feel happier and more satisfied in the coming year, it must at least be seen to tackle these problems seriously.

## The role of the humanities in communicating Europe and building regional networks

by Dr Simon Mercieca

ON THE EVE of the beginning of the German Presidency of the European Union, a series of workshops were organised across Europe by the European Movement Germany, the German Foreign Office and *Netzwerk Europäische Bewegung* (European Movement Network) to present Germany's EU agenda entitled "Communicating Europe and European Agenda" (CEEA).

A regional focus meeting held in Madrid on December 12-13 was aimed specifically for NGO organisations as well as EM, UEF, JEF and interested groups from Spain, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Italy, and Portugal. The latter countries form part of one of the four regional foci established within the EU.

This meeting was addressed by, among others, Dr Karlfried Bergner, head of Political Development and EU at the German Embassy in Spain, and Bernd Hüttemann from the European Movement Germany and other moderators from Brussels. In their presentations they explained the methodology, goals, priorities and expectations of the German Presidency.

This seminar was not aimed to be just an exercise in briefing and debriefing of strategies but was also intended to define the fields of action that should be taken by the German Presidency as well as formulating the first strategies on networking for the implementation of the CEEA modules. Germany is looking for concrete actions at regional level and is determined to seek the help of NGOs and other non-profit making organisations to arrive at the heart of the European population.

Recent events showed that Europe is living a paradox: while citizens expect the EU to solve their everyday problems, there is a deep mistrust of European institutions and politics. The No vote in the French and Dutch referendum on the EU Constitution is a proof (if any was needed) of this European dilemma. Citizens want a united "Europe", but they are also asking for more information, transparency, democracy and dialogue with the European institution which is now being equated with the word Brussels.

The main responsibility for a better dialogue and communication with the member states on European issues lies primarily on the national governments. They have the institutions and the apparatus to relay to their citizens. However, the evolution of the European institution, in particular the evolving legal and economic structures, are putting pressure on the national governments to toe the

Brussels line.

Today, 80 per cent of national legislation of most of the 25 member states is based on European legislation: European policy is slowly becoming national policy. In view of this situation, politicians and civil society decision-makers have to face new responsibilities and make an extra effort to communicate the European projects and policies at a national as well as trans-national level. Civil society is increasingly being considered as the linchpin between politics and citizens.

To achieve better communication between the political and legal administrative structures and European citizens, the German Foreign Office is seeking the support of European Movement Germany. With its network of about 130 member organisations representing the whole range of society, from employers associations, to trade unions, foundations, European academies, political parties, small European initiatives and many others, the movement is a model institution which governments are beginning to communicate with so that the message of the European Commission reaches the public.

Other models have been also adopted by the EU, in particular that of IT, through platforms and forums, thus seeking to be nearer its citizens. The EU is also building its own networks of civil society organisations. The newly founded Anna Lindh Foundation, for example, is striving to create a network of NGOs across Europe and the Mediterranean.

The pressure that civil society and the common citizens are exercising on the European Commission has sent red signals to Brussels, to which Brussels is seeking positive reactions. The EU Commission is recognising that these messages are coming from people that are in pain, usually, because they failed to recognise the power they have, through the NGOs, to have their voice heard in Europe and thus, exercise pressure on the formulation of policies.

Until now, Europe has been mostly built on legal and managerial frameworks. Lawyers and MBA graduates were considered indispensable in the formation of the EU legal and administrative structures. The MBAs are needed to execute and direct these structures in a professional manner. However, the employment of these graduates is not enough. It is being felt that the humanities element is extensively missing in EU structures.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau defined the arts as 'the language of the heart'. Students following Humanities courses are being professionally trained in this technique. Thus they are being considered as the necessary players to give to the European institution a human face. They are being trained, directly or indirectly, in communicating information and helping in fomenting dialogue in Europe. They are instruments in communication and dialogue.

The European Movement Germany is growing into a popular movement accessible to different organisations. The former Communist Party of Germany together with other NGO organisations has applied to join it. In fact, during the last two years and through its networks, the European Movement Germany was able to establish a dialogue platform in Germany which combines exchange of information between different groups of civil society. Within its concept of "Communicating Europe and European Agenda" (CEEA), the network which European Movement Germany created, has established a series of modules which facilitate communication and networking between political institutions and civil

society as best practice.

If one were to analyse the goals of the workshops organised for the implementation of the CEEA policy, one immediately notices the space that is being opened in Europe for students studying the Humanities. First of all, European civil society is asking the Commission to support the work of the NGOs towards the exchange of methods and best practices between different countries.

The German Presidency wants to improve the political debate at European level and the best practices policies. It is determined to help Brussels to develop strategies to raise awareness and information about Europe's multipliers and stakeholders.

This can be achieved first of all through the exchange of ideas and a pro-active dialogue. However, concrete modules of communication are needed, while new multipliers have to be developed and tested. The preferred methodology towards reaching this aim is through the building of regional clusters. Four regional clusters have been created. Humanities graduates are expected to have a pro-active role in particular in achieving the second step, that of transferring the established concepts from one region to the other in Europe.

Humanities graduates have received university training that varies according to the field of their specialisation but which they can easily adapt to the different programme modules formulated for the different regions and capitals of Europe. The engaged modulators are expected to work on concrete actions and initiatives. This means that they should keep themselves open towards the acquisition of new working tools and following induction courses in methodological and strategic training (whenever necessary) and be open to learn how to make networking with the EU institutions policies. The final aim is to enhance interaction and participation at a local level.

Furthermore, the engaged modulators should be ready to learn about trans-European co-operation, communication strategies, information dissemination and network-building. They should learn to develop and test new models of communicating Europe with the aim of having a multiplier effect. Thus, the performed actions will be reproducible and can develop further at civil society level. Furthermore, they acquire a dual capacity – that of enhancing face-to-face dialogue and electronic networking, both at vertical and horizontal level, among civil society groups and between the latter and the political institutions.

What is being proposed may appear rather exaggerated and sound like wishful thinking. However, this is not the case. In fact, a number of initiatives have already been undertaken all over Europe to bring the European institutions and in particular the European concept nearer to the citizens. They consist of interactive meetings, aimed at a target audience such as the successful Europa Caffé (where meetings with MEPs are being held in Scotland), the *Stammtisch* meetings organised in central Europe and other street actions.

Young students are among the preferred audiences. Popular quizzes for students are being organised while seminars for high profiles audiences such as journalists and think-tanks are held. Information Technology has a privileged place, in particular through friendly Websites, easy search tools and the building of shared databases.

The final objective is to build up interest in Europe among its citizens. On its part, the European Commission is ready to financially support NGOs' projects – through its different programmes – which try to achieve these aims. The challenge is now also being made to Maltese NGOs. It is up to them to meet it.

## The Sunday Times of Malta

### FIFTY YEARS AGO

DECEMBER 30, 1956

#### The spirit of Yuletide

The spirit of Yuletide has dwelt in every home this week. And now we start thinking of New Year resolutions. Tomorrow night Malta will resound to the pealing of church bells, the shrilling of whistles and the hooting of ships' sirens in the general merriment of Hogmanay, as people in the quiet of their own homes, at parties, or clubs, usher in the New Year with the sincere hope and prayer that 1957 will see a happy world at peace.

#### Mintoff in Rome on refugee issue

(Reuter's Service) – Rome. The Prime Minister of Malta, Mr D. Mintoff, was due to visit the headquarters of the Knights of Malta in Rome to see what assistance and guidance they could give to Maltese refugees from Egypt.

#### Restoration of frescoes

On Christmas Eve before Midnight Mass, Rev. Professor S.M. Zarb, OP, of St Dominic's Priory, Valletta, blessed and unveiled the restored paintings of the dome in the chapel of St Catherine of Siena. The work of restoration was carried out by Raphael Bonnici Calli, and the unveiling ceremony was attended by the community. Fr Zarb gave some information about the parish church of St Dominic and the frescoes of the painter Giuseppe Calli, who died in 1930.

#### Visiting footballers

The Austrian footballers of SK Wacker at present playing a series of matches here, were entertained together with club officials to tea by Mrs C. Scicluna Testaferrata at her lovely home in Gzira. Mrs Scicluna's sons and their wives and her daughters helped to entertain the visitors, and in spite of language difficulties, managed to make them feel very much at home.

The team have been to various cocktail parties held in their honour and have met many football fans and admirers. Wacker were guests of Hamrun Spartans Football Club and the Austrian footballers will be attending a cocktail party given by the Sliema Wanderers.

To round off their social activities the visitors will be entertained to yet another cocktail party by the organisers of the Christmas tourney, the Empire Stadium management and the Malta Football Association at MFA headquarters before this popular team leave for home.