
Tribute to Professor Guido de Marco

by Dr. Joe Borg

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How can one seek to characterize Professor Guido de Marco? A lawyer who in the field of criminal law had no equals; a politician who was, in equal measure, strategic and principled; a diplomat whose powers of persuasion became justly famous; a statesman who served his country with dignity and intelligence; a gentleman who was as kind as he could be pugnacious.

On the occasion of his demise last August there were, justly and unsurprisingly, many tributes made to Professor de Marco. It is difficult to say anything which has not been said before about his brilliance as a lawyer or about his indefatigable service to Malta or about his sense of purpose as President of the UN General Assembly.

I will therefore only make my own few personal reflections on this great man.

I got to know about Professor de Marco in the late sixties, when, in my teens, I started to be intrigued by the practice of law, and criminal law, in particular, due in good part to what I now describe as the “Perry Mason” infatuation; and then again when I began to interest myself in politics.

However, I only met Professor de Marco face to face when I joined the law course at the University of Malta and he was one of my lecturers during my first and second and then again during my fifth year. In my university days I relished listening to him lecture to us on criminal law. His wealth of knowledge of the subject and his own experience in that area of the law were unparalleled and this, when coupled with his flair and his personal insight, made his lectures a unique experience.

I then got to know Professor de Marco more closely when I started to involve myself in politics during the seventies and especially when I started to frequent the Nationalist Party Headquarters as member of the “Kunsill Generali” and then also of the “Ezekuttiv” (both being bodies within the Party setup). It was here that I experienced first hand this consummate politician that “Guido” was, as we novices in the political fray used to love calling him. This was the time when the Nationalist Party was in opposition in the seventies and in the early to mid-eighties.

After the electoral victory of 1987, by the Nationalist Party, and the decision taken by the new government in office to apply for membership of the then European Community, I had the extreme good fortune of working closely with him when he became Foreign Minister. This was only a short interval after I had been asked to set up an EU Directorate within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this context I worked intimately with him in order to prepare Malta for accession to the European Union. His commitment to Malta’s membership of the EU was strong, principled and determined.

As fate would have it I was appointed Foreign Minister when Professor de Marco became President of Malta. In this capacity I was privileged to sign Malta’s Treaty of Accession to the

European Union, a step which was facilitated by Professor de Marco's own tireless efforts. As Foreign Minister I took the cue from Professor de Marco and continued the policy of achieving European Union membership while at the same time emphasising Malta's Mediterranean vocation, as he always rightly maintained.

Professor de Marco's Presidency of Malta will long be remembered as one that, in his own words "was close to the people". Throughout his career he always remained close to the people and the people remained close to him.

Since December I have been called upon, once again, to succeed Professor de Marco; this time as the Chairman of the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies. I know how close to his heart MEDAC was. He saw in it a perfect vehicle for expressing the intrinsic importance of Mediterranean dialogue, exchange and friendship. I am honoured to have been called upon to continue pursuing these noble goals.

Following the legacy bequeathed to us by Professor de Marco, allow me now to say just a very few words on the objectives of MEDAC for the coming years.

MEDAC has achieved considerable success since its setting up and it now enjoys a strong repute in its fields of excellence. We cannot, however, rest on our laurels. We are committed to improve on what we have done so far by diversifying our field of activities both geographically and thematically. We are seeking to widen the current geographical network, possibly by inviting other countries and organisations on the Swiss, German or some other model. At the same time we are considering how to broaden the current academic interests of MEDAC, extending

them beyond the traditional diplomatic affairs to issues having an economic perspective or relating to environmental diplomacy or climate change. We are also seeking to develop new instruments, and to organise other activities, in addition to the ones we have, that can help us better address the new realities unfolding in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

The demands for the services that MEDAC can offer are constantly on the increase, and now even more so. We are more than ready to accede to such demands and to the considerable challenges of increased space and resources that, as a result, we will need to address.

I am certain that Professor de Marco would have wanted to do so. Now that he is no longer with us, it is up to us to deliver. And we will seek to do so because we firmly believe in the future of MEDAC and because we are driven by the same love that Professor de Marco nurtured for the Mediterranean waters that surround us.

In conclusion, I have the pleasure to announce that the Board of Administrators of MEDAC has just decided to set up a scholarship fund in memory of Professor Guido de Marco for the award of an annual scholarship to support one student to pursue a Masters in Diplomacy (M.Dip) with MEDAC.

Thank you.

