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INTRODUCTION

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The decision to publish the proceedings of the full day seminar on “The Effects of E.U. Membership on the Island Region of Gozo” is a very wise one. It will be welcomed by those who filled to capacity the conference hall of L-Imgarr Hotel on the 28th January 2000. But it will be of immense interest to those others in Gozo and Malta who were unable to be present at the seminar.

The Gozo Business Chamber is to be congratulated for holding such a successful seminar. The amount of interest generated by this event, the list of distinguished speakers, and the quality of the speeches, ensured not only the success of the seminar, but also a promise for follow-up action. The publication of the speeches is the first direct result.

As Speaker of the House of Representatives it gives me satisfaction to note that the setting-up of the Gozo Business Chamber was supported by Gozo MPs from both sides of the House. This augurs well for the success of the Chamber’s mission. The need had long been felt for business in Gozo to be organised into a corporate structure on modern lines. I am pleased to observe that following the active encouragement extended by the Honourable Minister for Gozo, the founding members of the Chamber have managed to bring under one umbrella most of the forward looking businessmen in Gozo. They have also managed to strike an understanding and a working arrangement with the senior business organisation in Malta, thus ensuring that its members can benefit from the resulting synergies.

It is encouraging to note the growing realisation that while it is very



important for a sector or an organisation to maintain its autonomy and freedom of action, the idea of linkages and complementarities must be promoted. The members of the Gozo Business Chamber have grasped this and they must have had this in mind when they conceived the idea of holding this seminar.

In the past Gozo had for far too long been considered an appendix, a minor irritant that had to be dealt with – a problem area lurking on the margin of the national agenda. In the past few decades this has to a large extent been corrected. The problems of development and progress still remain. But we now realise that sooner rather than later Gozo has to come of age, progressively becoming a contributor to the national economy. The apt description used in the title of the seminar of Gozo being an “Island Region” hits the nail on the head.

It is axiomatic to say that the whole is the sum of its parts. It therefore follows that the greater the parts the greater is the whole. The development and progress of Gozo is therefore of vital importance for the national economy. The purpose of Gozo becoming a contributor to the national well-being should be promoted and followed-up. The characteristics of Gozo and the Gozitans should be exploited to the full if the idea of an island region is to be pursued.

This requires the continued development of the infrastructure to provide a solution to the human resource problem of having a sizeable sector of Gozitan workers giving their service on the mainland rather than on Gozo itself.

I am sure that steps are being taken to tap funds in this regard, and I was pleased to note that during the seminar itself some reference was made to this issue. It was also pointed out most clearly that the geographical and social handicaps associated with double insularity could enable Gozo to qualify for particular assistance. The island region status needs also to be exploited towards this end.

In this regard I believe that the Gozo Business Chamber has a lot to offer. It has established not only its legitimate identity but also its credibility as a private sector business organisation which delivers effectively. It must now mobilise its representative functions to push ahead and call for the investment necessary for the sustainable economic development of Gozo.

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The Chamber has a role to play in promoting and helping to create the right economic environment for investment, particularly in the manufacturing and service industries. It will definitely act as a sounding board for prospective investors and, in consultation with the Government of the day, it can carry out its representative responsibility by directing attention to shortcomings and pointing out possible solutions for problems besetting business in Gozo. In line with other private sector organisations in Malta, it is charged with the duty of advising Government on a number of questions affecting the economic life of the country, with particular reference to Gozo. The Gozo Business Chamber should be consulted on an ongoing basis.

The papers presented at this seminar contain a wealth of ideas coming from various view-points but directed at the same subject. Making the text of the speeches available in book form will enable the readers to appreciate how entrepreneurs, politicians, economists and academics view the prospective development of the island region of Gozo, in the context of Malta's crucial negotiations with the European Union.