

Luxembourg PM says Malta will not have a 'third chance'

By Matthew Xuereb

Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker said if the referendum results in a No vote, there will be no other chances for Malta to join the European Union.

Addressing a joint press conference with Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami yesterday, Mr Juncker made it clear that Malta will not be given a third chance.

"If the Maltese say No in the referendum, after having withdrawn its application in 1996, it will not be given a third chance. This is not a game. Everyone in this country should know that this vote will affect Europe. This is not a joking matter – it has to be taken very seriously."

On the referendum in Ireland, Mr Juncker said that if the Irish people voted against the Nice Treaty for the second time, there would be no enlargement. "It is as simple as that," he said.

The Luxembourg Prime Minister also said no strategy existed for small countries to remain isolated.

"Malta could be isolated if it does not join the EU in the next enlargement. For small countries such as Malta, there is no strategy with which Malta can stand alone" said Mr Juncker.

"A stand-alone strategy is not helpful for small countries. The EU has importance beyond its own borders. Luxembourg with its 400,000 inhabitants would not have any partners in international affairs unless it was a member of the EU," he added.

Mr Juncker said it was not acceptable that new member states will become net contributors. "No member state will end up having a worse financial situation when compared to the year before accession," he said convincingly.

Asked about the benefits of becoming a member, Mr Juncker said: "Becoming a member of the EU is a big advantage for Malta. Before joining the union, Luxembourg was always a victim of our neighbours' decisions and today Luxembourg is there when decisions have to be taken."

Mr Juncker continued: "Because Malta is a small country, it will be important to be involved in the decision making process and present when they are implemented. So there are a number of reasons why Malta has to seek membership with the union."

Regarding the issue of VAT zero-rating for food and medicines, he said Malta should be able to maintain this position.

Mr Juncker also spoke about Luxembourg's experience as members of the EU. "Our experience within the EU is positive. We have the highest gross domestic product per capita not only in the EU but worldwide. We could have never achieved this performance otherwise. I repeat, there is no stand alone strategy for small countries," he said.

Dr Fenech Adami said he was very grateful that Mr Juncker found the time to visit Malta, especially at this time when in Malta there was a heated debate on Malta's future relationship with the EU.

He said that during their meeting they discussed the excellent bilateral and political relations between the two countries.

Earlier yesterday, Mr Juncker called on President Guido de Marco. Both sides dis-

cussed areas of common interest between the two countries. Among the topics discussed were Euro-Mediterranean issues, in particular, stability in the Mediterranean region, and the role of an enlarged European family in international affairs.

Later in the afternoon, the President and Mrs de Marco, hosted a luncheon in his honour.

Mr Juncker also met Opposition leader Alfred Sant at the Corinthia Palace Hotel. The meeting was not open for the press. However, later Dr Sant described the meeting as cordial. He said the two discussed the Labour Party's vision of close relations with the European Union, but short of membership. He said they also spoke about various aspects of Malta's neutrality.

Mr Juncker and Dr Sant also spoke about how a new Labour government would tackle Malta's development, problems and economic challenges.

Dr Sant said Mr Juncker expressed his opinion on the union's development. Asked what this opinion was, Dr Sant did not comment.

After addressing a public dialogue entitled *The Great Challenges of Europe* and attending a farewell ceremony at Castille Square, Mr Juncker left Malta in the evening.

Learning from Luxembourg

Malta and Luxembourg have a lot in common and can learn from each other, a meeting heard yesterday.

Parliamentary secretary Jesmond Mugliett met Marie-Josée Jacobs, Luxembourg's Minister for Family, Social Solidarity and Youth, and also Minister for the Advancement of Women, and they signed a cooperation agreement which covers such issues as student exchange, voluntary work, training programmes and social benefits.

The two sides agreed that their countries have a great deal to offer each other. Luxembourg can share its experiences on how a small member of the EU can make the most of membership while Malta can help student organisations in Luxembourg develop strong ties with the Mediterranean.

Malta's successful training programmes for young people through such initiatives as the YOUTH and Euro-Med programmes were praised and Ms Jacobs spoke about Luxembourg's experience in mediation and conflict resolution.

Officials from Luxembourg expressed an interest in sending young people to Malta so they can join in a wide range of activities as part of the Euro-Mediterranean Youth Action Programme. This is expect-

ed to start happening in the coming weeks.

The two ministers also discussed ways in which the two countries were preparing young people in the field of informatics. Mr Mugliett spoke about the Youthnet Project which was launched earlier this year as a way to allow young people to share information.

Another issue discussed involved setting up a discussion forum for ministers responsible for the young people of Europe's small countries.

Also present at the meeting were Franz Mueller, Luxembourg's head of youth, and Paul Buhagiar and Annette Scerri, head of the YOUTH Programme.

Later in the day, Ms Jacobs met Social Policy Minister Lawrence Gonzi.

They shared information about each other's jobs and discussed topics including government aid to women, social benefits, health and safety and social security.

Dr Gonzi explained a number of government initiatives implemented in the past four years. He spoke about the opening of day centres to look after the children of working women and social benefits such as maternity leave and parental leave, which have come into force as part of the Industrial Relations Act.

Ms Jacobs said the government of Luxembourg helps women wanting to strike a balance between family life and going to work. She pointed out a number of similarities between the situations in Luxembourg and Malta and said she was pleased with the way the Maltese Government deals with issues such as social security and social benefits.

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Official visit: Luxembourg PM Jean-Claude Juncker



Similarities: Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean Claude Juncker (middle) discussed the similarities between his country and Malta with Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami (left) and other MPs

“No third chance for Malta if Maltese vote ‘no’”

Jesmond Bonello

Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean Claude Juncker yesterday said there would be no third chance for Malta to join the EU if the Maltese voted 'no' in next year's referendum.

“After withdrawing its application in 1996, there will no third time for Malta. This is not a game. This is a serious job for Malta and for Europe. This is not for children.”

Speaking at a joint news conference with Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami, Mr Juncker stressed there would be no EU enlargement if the Irish people voted against the Nice Treaty for the second time in their referendum this month. This was evidence, he said, of the influence of small countries in the EU.

Mr Juncker yesterday also became the first prime minister among the 15 member states to publicly declare that he supported Malta's request to the EU to retain zero VAT rating on food and medicines as long as other member states had similar arrangements. He said that Malta's demands were feasible.

This issue of taxation remains one of the most problematic areas for Malta to settle in the membership talks.

Speaking at a public meeting organised by the Malta-EU Information Centre later in the evening, Mr Juncker also said Malta should have six MEPs, the same as Luxembourg – and not five as it was allocated in the Nice Treaty.

He was also blunt when he spoke on the distinction between membership and staying out: “There is no comparison between the opportunities that Malta will have as an EU member and if it decides to stay out with the status of an interested observer. One is in or one is out. It is a clear choice.”

He also said there was no “Europe à la carte” outside membership.

Mr Juncker had a hectic day yesterday with one meeting after another. He met President Guido de Marco, Labour leader Alfred Sant and Finance Minister John Dalli in his capacity as finance minister. He also toured Malta Freeport.

The focal point of his visit was the Auberge de Castille where he met Dr Fenech Adami.

Mr Juncker and Dr Fenech Adami also presided over the signing of an agreement between the two countries on stronger cooperation in areas related to young people. The agreement was signed by parliamentary secretary Jesmond Mugliett and Minister Marie-Josée Jacobs. Mr Juncker recalled that back in 1997, when the EU launched the present enlargement process under his chairmanship (Luxembourg had the EU rotating presidency at that time), he was sad to see Malta miss-

ing from this important process.

“Now that Malta is back on track, the performance and the adjustment is inspiring. The Maltese are very committed to this process and getting back on track has been very successful indeed.”

Mr Juncker said one of the greatest benefits of EU membership for Malta would be sitting round a table where decisions are taken.

“Before the European Community was set up, Luxembourg was always the victim of our neighbours' decisions.”

“Today they have to ask what Luxembourg's position is and we have a say in the decision-making process. We have a vote just like all the other members.”

He said even Switzerland had to follow the developments that take place in the EU and adopt 80 per cent of European legislation.

“It will be better if they sit round the table where decisions that directly affect them are taken. The same applies to Malta.”

“Luxembourg, as a partner in international affairs, would no longer exist if it were not an EU member.”

“To give you an example, as a prime minister of 400,000 people, this year I already had the opportunity to make official visits to the US, Russia and China. I am sure that if we were not an EU member, this would not happen. But they treat the EU as a whole... they do not make a distinction. If Malta were not an active EU applicant, your prime minister wouldn't be abroad so often.”

Mr Juncker also attributed Luxembourg's economic success to EU membership.

“We have the highest GDP per capita – not only in the EU but worldwide. We couldn't have achieved this performance without membership.”

Commenting on the feasibility of the Labour Party's Switzerland of the Mediterranean/partnership proposals, Mr Juncker made it very clear he had no intention of interfering in the domestic debate.

He did say, however, that Malta had a strategic location in Europe, which made it possible to develop stronger ties with the EU than other countries, such as Russia or Ukraine.

“Malta has a better chance of being a member of the EU for one easily understandable reason. It can be a gateway for investors coming from outside Europe. Malta is strategically located and can attract investors towards the European continent. I see this as a real opportunity.”

Dr Fenech Adami said his meeting with Mr Juncker focused on areas of negotiations that had not yet been completed. He said Mr Juncker was very appreciative of Malta's position on the remaining negotiation issues and that Luxembourg would be assisting Malta in this regard.

Dr Fenech Adami described the two countries' bilateral and political relations as excellent.

On commercial and economic relations, however, Dr Fenech Adami said there was room for improvement.



Mr Juncker with Labour Party leader Alfred Sant.



Luxembourg Prime Minister Mr. Claude Juncker addressing a joint press conference with Eddie Fenech Adami yesterday.

PICTURE: ALFRED GALIJA



The two prime ministers inspecting a guard of honour at a formal ceremony in Valletta.

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Luxembourg PM on two-day visit

Jesmond Bonello

The Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Jean Claude Juncker, has started a two-day official visit to Malta.

On his arrival yesterday afternoon, Mr Juncker was given a warm welcome by Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami followed by an official ceremony at the Malta International Airport. He also inspected an Armed Forces guard of honour and the national anthems of the two countries were played.

In the evening, Mr Juncker was hosted to an official dinner at the Auberge de Castille.

Mr Juncker will today be having talks with Dr Fenech Adami which are expected to focus on the final stage of Malta's EU membership negotiations and the remaining outstanding issues. Dr Fenech Adami is expected to brief Mr Juncker on the progress achieved by Malta in the accession talks and the final preparations before the formal closure of negotiations.

Malta and Luxembourg are also expected to sign a bilateral agreement.

This morning, Mr Juncker will also be calling on President Guido de Marco and meeting Opposition Leader Alfred Sant.

Mr Juncker, who is also responsible for the finance portfolio, will also be meeting Finance Minister John Dalli. He will also be visiting the Malta Freeport.

He is also expected to address a public dialogue at the Old University Building organised by the

Malta-EU Information Centre this afternoon.

Mr Juncker, of the conservative Christian Social party, heads a coalition with the Democratic party. He came to power in 1995 when his predecessor, Jacques Santer, became president of the European Commission. Mr Juncker was re-elected in 1999.

Mr Juncker is also accompanied by Marie-Jose Jacobs, Minister for Family, Social Solidarity and

Youth and Minister for the Advancement of Women.

Toasting Mr Juncker at last night's dinner, the prime minister welcomed him "as a future partner for Malta in the great family of the European Union".

Saying that Malta would conclude negotiations in a few weeks' time, he remarked that the final phase was, inevitably, the most complex and difficult.

"It touches upon the most sensitive issues, as much for the candidate countries as for the Union itself. Membership is a desired objective, in both political and economic terms. At the same time the conditions upon which this membership is to be achieved have short-term implications which need careful nurturing.

"As the final negotiations gather pace much of our immediate attention will inevitably be devoted to these short-term implications.

Nevertheless, we cannot lose sight of the broader aspects of what we are trying to achieve through membership of the Union."

The Union, said the prime minister, was a "grand and unique" European experiment aimed at ensuring the continuing security and prosperity of all the peoples on this continent, in peace and cooperation with peoples of other regions.

He said Malta was most interested in learning from Mr Juncker how a country whose popular motto was "We want to remain what we are", had made such a success of membership.

Replying, Mr Juncker said trade between the two countries needed to improve.

He noted that Dr Fenech Adami enjoyed an excellent reputation in Europe in all political quarters.

He said he was one of those in the European Union who were not

happy after Malta withdrew its membership bid.

He was a "happy man" again now that Malta was back on track, and was convinced that the country would be able to conclude accession negotiations before the end of the year.

The Europeans, he said, felt that with Malta as a constructive and proactive member, it would be a richer continent politically.

He argued that the EU should take on board a number of specific Maltese problems related to its size, referring in particular to agricultural concerns. He said these concerns should not only be viewed with sympathy but be part of the accession treaties.

The Luxembourg delegation leaves this evening.



Eddie Fenech Adami and Jean Claude Juncker inspecting an Armed Forces guard of honour.