



L-ERBATAX-IL LEGIŻLATURA

P.L. 2137

Dokument imqiegħed fuq il-Mejda tal-Kamra tad-Deputati fis-Seduta
Numru 149 tat-2 ta' Ottubru 2023 mill-Ispeaker, l-Onor. Anġlu Farrugia.

Raymond Scicluna
Skrivan tal-Kamra

Information visit to the European Commission

**4 – 6 September 2023
Brussels, Belgium**

**Hon Anglu Farrugia, Speaker
Hon David Agius, MP
Hon Malcolm Agius Galea, MP
Hon Charles Azzopardi, MP
Hon Alex Borg, MP
Hon Bernice Bonello, MP
Hon Albert Buttigieg, MP
Hon Naomi Cachia, MP
Hon Abigail Camilleri, MP
Hon Darren Carabott, MP
Hon Jerome Caruana Cilia, MP
Hon Janice Chetcuti, MP
Hon Robert Cutajar, MP
Hon Katya De Giovanni, MP
Hon Mark Anthony Sammut, MP
Hon Amanda Spiteri Grech, MP
Hon Julie Zahra, MP
Hon Stanley Zammit, MP**

REPORT BY SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT PARTICIPATING IN CONFERENCE ABROAD

1. TITLE OF CONFERENCE:

INFORMATION VISIT TO THE EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

2. DATE:

4 - 6 SEPTEMBER 2023

3. NAME OF MEMBER:

SPEAKER ANGLU FARRUGIA

HON. DAVID AGIUS; HON. MALCOLM AGIUS
GALEA; HON. CHARLES AZZOPARDI; HON. ALEX
BORG; HON. BERNICE BONELLO; HON. ALBERT
BUTTIGIEG; HON. NAOMI CACHIA; HON. ABIGAIL
CAMILLERI; HON. DARREN CARABOTT; HON.
JEROME CARUANA CILIA; HON. JANICE
CHETCUTI; HON. ROBERT CUTAJAR; HON. KATYA
DE GIOVANNI; HON. MARK ANTHONY SAMMUT;
HON. AMANDA SPITERI GRECH; HON. JULIE
ZAHRA; HON. STANLEY ZAMMIT

4. ITEM/S ON THE AGENDA:

The programme for the information visit by the Members of the Maltese Parliament to the European Commission is attached as Doc. A.

5. CONCLUSIONS OF THE MEETING:

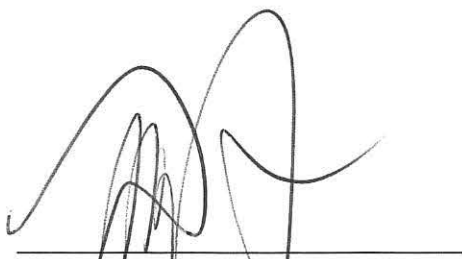
N/A

6. INTERVENTION MADE BY THE MEMBERS:

N/A

7. IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS YOU FEEL SHOULD BE ATTACHED:

The report by the research analyst is attached as Doc. B.



Speaker Anglu Farrugia

29/9/23

Date



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 europeancommission

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 @EuropeanCommission

Programme

For the information visit to the European Commission

Members of the Maltese Parliament

Brussels, 05 September 2023

Visitors' Centre of the European Commission

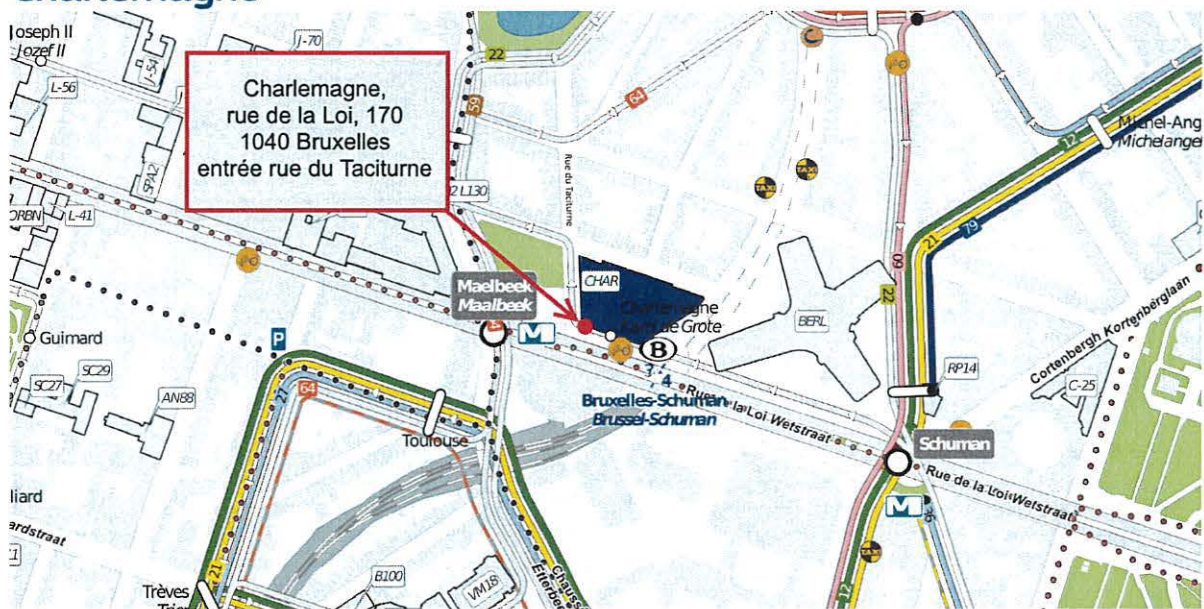
Building : Charlemagne - Rue de la Loi 170, 1000 - Bruxelles

Visit Number: 435952



Practical Information

Charlemagne



Visit Organiser and Logistics

Name	Ms Isabelle VAN KEIRSBILCK
Directorate-General	Communication
Address	European Commission, Rue de la Loi 170, B-1000 Brussels
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GSM	+32 475 891990
E-Mail	Isabelle.Van-Keirsbilck@ec.europa.eu
Visit's Assistants Office	+32(0)2 29-55364
Number of visitors	24
Conference room	CHAR 2 - Building Charlemagne - Rue de la Loi 170, 1000 - Bruxelles

Visitors should ensure that they have their identity cards or passports with them at all times as they will be asked to show them when entering Commission buildings.

In case of delay please call your visit organiser or the Visit's Assistant Office

4 September

19.05

Arrival at Brussels airport of flight KM20

Transfer by coach to hotel

Hotel Martin's Brussels EU

Bd Charlemagne 80, 1000 Bruxelles, Belgique

Telephone : +32 2 230 85 55

6 September

17.00 : pick up by coach at hotel and transfer to Zaventem Airport

19.55 : departure flight KM421 Brussels - Malta

22.40 : Arrival Valetta

Day Planning for September 5, 2023

Events will be taking place in:

Room **CHAR 2**

Building "**Charlemagne**" (**CHAR**)

Located at **Rue de la Loi 170, 1000 - Bruxelles**

📶 The building offers wireless access. You can use `guest_comp@comp` / `guest_comp` to log in.

08:45 - 09:00	<i>Arrival at Charlemagne (CHAR) - Security checks - Welcome by Mrs Isabelle VAN KEIRSBILCK</i> Rue de la Loi 170, 1000 - Bruxelles
09:00 - 10:00	<i>Introduction to Vice-President Šuica's portfolio</i> Mr Colin SCICLUNA Head of Cabinet to Vice-President ŠUICA, responsible for Democracy and Demography
10:00 - 11:00	<i>Meeting with Mrs Charmaine HILL</i> Migration and Home Affairs Adviser Cabinet of President von der Leyen
11:00 - 11:15	Break
11:15 - 12:15	<i>Digital Economy</i> Ms Renate NIKOLAY Director-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology
12:15 - 12:30	Walk to BERL - Security checks
12:30 - 14:30	<i>Lunch presided by Commissioner DALLI, responsible for Equality</i> venue Berl 13th floor
14:30 - 15:00	Walk to Charlemagne building - Security checks
15:00 - 16:00	<i>The EU's Competition policy</i> Ms Linsey MCCALLUM Deputy Director General Antitrust and Regulation of Digital Platforms Directorate-General for Competition
16:00 - 16:30	Break
16:30 - 17:30	Meeting with Commissioner Ylva JOHANSSON, responsible for Home Affairs

17:30 - 18:00	Walk to the European Parliament
18:00 - 18:30	Meeting with President Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament (venue European Parliament)

Day Planning for September 6, 2023

08:30 - 09:30	Breakfast meeting with Ambassador Marlene Bonnici, Permanent Representative of Malta to the EU (venue Representation of Malta to the EU)
09:30 - 10:00	Meeting with Ambassador Clint TANTI, Ambassador of Malta to Belgium
10:30 - 12:00	Visit to the House of European History, Rue Belliard, 135, Brussels
12:00	End of the information visit
17:00	Pick up by coach at hotel and transfer to Zaventem Airport
19:55	Departure flight KM421 Brussels - Malta
22:40	Arrival Malta International Airport

THANK YOU FOR YOUR VISIT !

Links to other websites

Energy



<https://ec.europa.eu/energy/>

Competition



https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/competition_en

Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers



Justice, consumer and gender equality policies

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/index_en.htm

About EU



<http://europa.eu>

Growth



https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/index_en

Climate Action



Tweet on EU Climate Action

<https://twitter.com/EUClimateAction>

DG Migration and Home Affairs policy portfolio



http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/index_en.htm

European Small Business Portal



http://ec.europa.eu/small-business/index_en.htm

Digital Economy and Society Index



<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi>

6 Commission priorities for 2019-24



<https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024>

Climate Action



http://ec.europa.eu/clima/index_en

Directorate-General for Competition



http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/competition/index_en.htm

NEWS - Highlights, press releases and speeches



https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news_en

Common European Asylum System



https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum_en

Conference on the Future of Europe



<https://futureu.europa.eu/>

Commission Work Programme



https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy-documents/commission-work-programme_en

Information visit for the Members of the Maltese Parliament to the European Commission

2 - 6 September 2023, Brussels, Belgium

The Head of the Maltese delegation for the information visit to the European Commission was the Speaker Mr Anġlu Farrugia. The rest of the delegation consisted of Hon. David Agius; Hon. Malcolm Agius Galea; Hon. Charles Azzopardi; Hon. Alex Borg; Hon. Bernice Bonello; Hon. Albert Buttigieg; Hon. Naomi Cachia; Hon. Abigail Camilleri; Hon. Darren Carabott; Hon. Jerome Caruana Cilia; Hon. Janice Chetcuti; Hon. Robert Cutajar; Hon. Katya de Giovanni; Hon. Mark Anthony Sammut; Hon. Amanda Spiteri Grech; Hon. Julie Zahra; Hon. Stanley Zammit.

This information visit was organised by the Representation of the European Commission in Malta. On the first day, the delegation met with a number of European Commission officials and President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola, while on the second day the delegation met with Ambassador Marlene Bonnici, Permanent Representative of Malta to the EU and Ambassador of Malta to Belgium Clint Tanti.

Introduction to Vice-President Šuica's portfolio

Mr Colin SCICLUNA

Mr Colin Scicluna is the Head of Cabinet of the Vice President of the European Commission Dubravka Šuica. Mr. Scicluna provided insights into the responsibilities held by Commissioner VP Šuica, shedding light on the Commission's multifaceted initiatives. This includes the Commission's endeavours in the realm of deliberative democracy and the Conference on the Future of Europe, both under her purview. Addressing the pressing issue of demography, the Commission has undertaken extensive efforts to assess the impact of demographic change and identify necessary support measures. This encompasses investments in critical infrastructure and the provision of essential services, particularly for the most vulnerable segments of society. Furthermore, these efforts extend to the coordination of a long-term vision for rural areas, encompassing considerations related to the effects of demographic shifts on connectivity and access to essential services. Commissioner Šuica also plays a pivotal role in overseeing the Youth Guarantee and launching a comprehensive discourse on the long-term consequences of an ageing population. This discourse squarely focuses on matters of caregiving and pensions while advocating for active ageing initiatives. In conclusion, Mr. Scicluna highlighted the significance of the Conference on the Future of Europe. This citizen-led series of debates and discussions, spanning from April 2021 to May 2022, served as a platform for individuals from all corners of Europe to exchange ideas and collectively shape our shared future.

Meeting with Migration and Home Affairs Adviser Cabinet of President von der Leyen

Mrs Charmaine HILI

In the second session, Mrs Charmaine Hili talked about the major challenges being faced by the Commission. With the backdrop of the European Parliament elections next year, Mrs Hili discussed the main priorities and flagship initiatives of the Commission for the coming year, building on the successes and achievements of the European Union in recent years. Over the past year, Europeans have weathered an energy crisis, welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees in the largest population

displacement since World War II, and boosted the economy with unprecedented investment in the post-covid recovery. Mrs Hili also addressed the rising right-wing populism and the challenges it brings about, as well as European external relations with Ukraine and China.

Speaker Anglu Farrugia addressed a critical concern that holds paramount significance for Malta—migration. In his remarks, he underscored the delicate balance that must be struck between national security imperatives and the humanitarian imperative to assist migrants undertaking perilous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea. He emphasized the pressing need for burden sharing, a principle that has been actively pursued by the European Commission through its efforts in crafting the New Migration Pact.

Turning to the matter of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Speaker Farrugia articulated the necessity for a united front within the European Union's Common Foreign Policy. He stressed the vital role the EU can play in promoting peace and stability in the region. As a first step, he advocated for the initiation of dialogue among all relevant stakeholders to facilitate negotiations and ultimately secure a ceasefire. Admittedly, this is a formidable challenge, but Speaker Farrugia affirmed that the pursuit of a peaceful resolution should remain the EU's paramount priority in this complex geopolitical context.

Digital Economy **Ms Renate NIKOLAY**

Ms Renate Nikolay, from the Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, spoke about the EU's digital economy. This particular DG carries out the Commission's policies on the digital economy and society, and research and innovation. At a time when the internet and digital technologies are transforming our world, a Europe fit for the digital age is one of the European Commission's main priorities. Focusing on the digital economy, Ms Nikolay presented an overview of the Commission work programme. In March 2021 the Commission proposed a path to the Digital Decade. This policy programme is guided by the 2030 Digital Compass – a plan to achieve digital transformation of the EU economy and society. The Digital Compass aims towards a secure human-centred digital ecosystem, where citizens are empowered, and businesses prosper from the digital potential. The Compass indicates four cardinal points for this trajectory: digital skills, secure and performant digital infrastructure, digital transformation of businesses and the digitalisation of public services. This political agenda aligns with EU norms and standards to strengthen the EU's digital sovereignty. A number of budgetary instruments will support the investments necessary to build Europe's Digital Decade on solid foundations.

The agenda calls for an intensification of work that began in the previous decade to accelerate Europe's digital transformation, building on progress towards a fully functioning Digital Single Market. The EU's Digital Single Market Strategy paved the way for closer digital harmonisation between the EU Member States. Launched in 2015, it aimed to contribute to economic growth, boosting jobs, competition, investment and innovation in the EU, based on three pillars:

- Access: better access for consumers and businesses to digital goods and services across Europe;

- Environment: creating the right conditions and a level playing field for digital networks and innovative services to flourish;
- Economy & Society: maximising the growth potential of the digital economy.

Speaker Anġlu Farrugia highlighted Malta's commendable strides in the realm of digitalization, noting that the nation has made significant relative progress in both its economy and society. Over the past five years, Malta has consistently maintained a commendable position within the EU in terms of digital advancement. Nevertheless, Speaker Farrugia stressed that such progress is not without its challenges, and it falls upon us to effectively address and manage these emerging issues.

One pressing challenge he underscored is the proliferation of online hate speech. Speaker Farrugia emphasized that the regulation of online speech should not rest solely on the shoulders of the tech industry giants. Entities like Elon Musk's ventures and X (formerly known as Twitter), as well as Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook and Instagram, may not necessarily be the best arbiters of online speech regulation. Instead, Speaker Farrugia advocated for the establishment of a comprehensive mechanism within the EU that ensures a level playing field for all stakeholders.

Furthermore, Speaker Farrugia delved into the realm of emerging social media platforms, such as TikTok. He asserted that the need for regulation extends to these platforms, especially from a cybersecurity perspective, as they have gained significant prominence in recent times. The ever-evolving landscape of digital communication warrants a comprehensive approach to safeguard both user experiences and cybersecurity in an increasingly interconnected world.

The EU's Competition policy **Ms Linsey McCALLUM**

Ms Linsey McCallum addressed the delegation and introduced the EU's competition policy. Competition policy encourages companies to offer consumers goods and services on the most favourable terms. It encourages efficiency and innovation and reduces prices. To be effective, competition requires companies to act independently of each other, and subject to the pressure exerted by their competitors. In a free market, business should be a competitive game with consumers as the beneficiaries. Sometimes companies try to limit competition. To preserve well-functioning product markets, authorities like the Commission must prevent or correct anti-competitive behaviour. To achieve this, the Commission monitors:

- abuse of a dominant position – where a major player tries to squeeze competitors out of the market
- agreements between companies that restrict competition – cartels or other unfair arrangements in which companies agree to avoid competing with each other and try to set their own rules
- mergers (and other formal agreements whereby companies join forces permanently or temporarily) – legitimate provided they expand markets and benefit consumers
- financial support (state aid) for companies from EU governments – allowed provided it does not distort fair and effective competition between companies in EU countries or harm the economy

- sectoral pages relevant to specific markets such as energy and the environment, financial services and information communication technologies
- cooperation with national competition authorities in EU countries (who are also responsible for enforcing aspects of EU competition law) – to ensure that EU competition law is applied in the same way across the EU

Meeting with Commissioner Ylva Johansson, responsible for Home Affairs

For the last session of the first day, the parliamentary delegation with Commissioner Ylva Johansson, who is responsible for Home Affairs. She introduced her portfolio, focusing on the fight against crime and child sexual abuse.

The European Commission is developing a new EU internal security strategy, advancing measures to prevent and respond to terrorism and prosecute those responsible, including with strong enforcement and implementation of legislation. This is done by stepping up cooperation on law enforcement, with a particular look at Europol's mandate. In this case, National Parliaments play a crucial role as they have the ability to scrutinise Europol's activities through their biannual interparliamentary conference. Commissioner Johansson spoke about the proper implementation of laws on the interoperability of EU information systems and improve cross-border cooperation between law enforcement authorities. She briefly addressed developing a new pact on Migration and Asylum, which focuses on developing a more sustainable, reliable and permanent approach to search and rescue. She also spoke about stepping up the fight against child sexual abuse.

Speaker Anġlu Farrugia spoke about fighting organised crime. In his speech, he commended the diligent efforts of the Maltese police force, particularly highlighting their recent successes in thwarting major drug smuggling operations. Notably, he mentioned the interception of a substantial drug shipment at Malta's freeport, en route to continental Europe from Ecuador. Speaker Farrugia echoed the Commissioner's call for enhanced police cooperation, underscoring the formidable challenges that smaller nations like Malta face when confronted with large-scale criminal networks. Speaker Farrugia delved into the importance of international partnerships in the fight against organized crime. He cited the recent agreement between the European Union and the United States to exchange bank details of suspected criminals as a crucial step in this direction. With the escalating use of digital payment methods, he drew attention to the rising instances of digital victim abuse and stressed the need for law enforcement agencies and relevant authorities to be adequately equipped to combat digital crimes, including online hate speech.

Moreover, the Speaker addressed the persistent issue of irregular migration, a matter of perennial concern for Malta. He specifically discussed the distressing problem of human trafficking in South Libya, emphasizing that an effective strategy to combat organized human trafficking involves tracking the financial flows of these criminal enterprises and targeting their sources of income. Speaker Anġlu Farrugia's insightful remarks underscored the multifaceted challenges posed by organized crime and the necessity for proactive and collaborative approaches to tackle these issues on both regional and international fronts.

Meeting with Ambassador Marlene Bonnici, Permanent Representative of Malta to the EU

Meeting with Ambassador Clint Tanti, Ambassador of Malta to Belgium

On the last day of the visit, the Maltese parliamentary delegation met with the Head of Mission of the Permanent Representative of Malta to the EU. Amb. Marlene Bonnici gave an overview of the work carried out by the Permanent Representation of Malta. It plays a central role in representing Malta in negotiations that take place in the Council of the European Union and in relations with other institutions, in particular the European Parliament and the European Commission. The experts working at the Permanent Representation attend meetings of the various groups that have been set up to carry out consultations between the Member States, the Commission and the other EU institutions. The preparation and discussions of EU laws also takes place in these working groups.

During negotiations, the Maltese representatives in the respective working groups put forward the position of the Maltese Government and ensure that Maltese interests are promoted and safeguarded with the scope of reaching a compromise beneficial for both Malta, Member States and the European Union. The Permanent Representation plays a crucial role and supports the work of members of the Government at meetings of the Council of Ministers of the European Union as well as the Prime Minister at European Council meetings with other Heads of State and/or Government from other Member States. The work of the Council is prepared by the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER), which meets every week. This committee also monitors and coordinates the work of the working groups composed of officials from the Member States who prepare the technical work on the files which are then submitted to COREPER and eventually to the Council, where final compromise is reached.

In the second part of the session, Amb. Clint Tanti who spoke about the day-to-day work of the Embassy. The Maltese embassy in Belgium is taking various initiatives to promote Maltese language and culture to unite the Maltese in Belgium. Over the last 20 years, the presence of Maltese especially in Brussels, has increased considerably. The Belgium embassy operates from Dar Malta in Brussels and also copes with the interests of the country in Luxembourg and NATO countries. The Maltese embassy has two diplomats Ambassador Clint Tanti and Counsel Omar Agius who also found collaboration from the Permanent Maltese Representative for the EU which operates from the same building in the Belgium capital.

With 1000 Maltese living in Belgium this is the largest diaspora of Maltese in Europe, so there is a lot of consular work such as renewal of passports, registration of births, emergencies such as theft of passports or even more serious circumstances. They also handle the needs of the Maltese community in Luxembourg, which includes 300 Maltese citizens. Amb. Clint Tanti referred to the inauguration last month of a library which will be loaning Maltese books. It will be open in the afternoon on certain days of the week.