

PRESS RELEASE

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Full disclosure on former ITS site project needed

In the interest of good governance and of all concerned, the sooner the country has full and official clarity on this project, the earlier all unnecessary speculation and suspicion is eliminated.

The recent NAO report on the disposal of the site formerly occupied by the Institute of Tourism Studies, highlights a number of serious and legitimate concerns about the regularity or otherwise of the tender for the transfer of the Institute of Tourism Studies building in St Julians by Projects Malta five years ago. As a result, the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry is compelled to call for transparent, honest, detailed and comprehensive explanations on this case in the interest of good governance.

The Malta Chamber finds the NAO's findings disturbing as they leave serious doubts as to the sense of urgency that drove Government to dispose of the ITS site. This seemed to happen at a time when there seemed to be no alternative premises available, with an unclear negotiation process and ownership of responsibility for the decisions taken.

The NAO report also raised transparency concerns with respect to the information disclosed in the request for proposals. "Although the residential component of the project was key in securing its viability, this element was given limited exposure. Another element verified was whether the provisions of the Public Procurement Regulations were adhered to in the transfer.

Projects Malta Ltd intentionally classified the transfer as a concession but failed to obtain the authorisation of the Department of Contracts prior to the publication of the RfP. This omission casts doubt on the regularity of the Request for Proposals," the National Audit office said.

It said it had 'major concerns' with respect to the Negotiation Committee, with certain members failing to provide any input.

The Malta Chamber has already been vocal about this case as well as other cases involving the disposal of public land and its call for the highest standards of good governance and best use of national resources remain.

While acknowledging the historic fact that the permit for this project was effectively revoked, several questions remain, mainly surrounding the basis, content and changes to a new application that was subsequently lodged at the Planning Authority.

The Malta Chamber believes that this project (and other significant projects too) should be an opportunity for the country, to achieve the objectives and ambitions related to the standards in tourism that our country envisions. Such projects cannot be dealt with in a piece-meal fashion, and that such a project should be respectful of true and strong national tourism industry ambitions, respectful of public expectations and contribute to true quality goals in an honest, consistent, transparent and sustainable manner.

As Malta's foremost representative body of ethical businesses, The Malta Chamber is compelled to call on Government and all competent authorities to practice the highest ethical standards with regards to the disposal of public property.

In its document "Ethical Business Calls for Change – a manifesto for Good Governance", The Malta Chamber described accountability, transparency and rule of law as the three main pillars of good governance. This principle remains true and needs to be respected even when the whole country seems to be focused on other, arguably more urgent matters.

Shadows that persist on such cases do nothing but harm the over-all credibility and transparency of Government, its authorities and the country as a whole.

As it has done in the past about other projects, The Chamber shall continue to await official pronouncements and explanations about this project. While the Chamber appreciates that the authorities are presently focusing on an unprecedented emergency, they must leave no stone unturned in getting to the bottom of this story with a view to provide the country with full clarity on this project in the interest of good governance and all concerned.

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