

PRESS RELEASE

25th August 2015

Malta Chamber notes revised plans to locate education investment

The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry notes the publication of revised plans to locate the announced Jordanian investment in Malta within a reduced ODZ footprint as well as in a regenerated historical building in Cospicua's Dock 1. To this end, the Malta Chamber makes the following considerations.

The Chamber remains in favour of this foreign direct investment project given that it is planned in the field of education which is one of the sectors identified for growth by the Malta Chamber in its Economic Vision 2014-2020. Above all, it is private-sector and export-led with a promise of notable direct economic benefits besides multiplier effects on related sectors.

The Malta Chamber notes the Government's claim that the project will have a positive economic impact on the economy of between €48 million and €85 million. Government needs to ensure that these goals materialise. Milestones for the achievements of said goals need to be set, for their efficient monitoring.

With regards to its location, the Chamber has gone on record several times to state that the regeneration of dilapidated, under-utilised urban zones or buildings must take precedence over the continued use of land lying outside the development zones. While it is understood that by locating the project in an under-utilised building in a developing area will certainly contribute to the economic and social regeneration of Cospicua, the project cannot be expected to single-handedly solve all the area's problems.

Whilst noting that the area of ODZ land to be used has now been drastically reduced, the Chamber would have preferred the use of ODZ land to be avoided completely with the project being located entirely in a retrofitted building or on land within an inside-scheme zone. That said, however, the Chamber is not in favour of rigid or prescriptive policies that could distort a decision-making process that could strike a positive balance between socio-economic growth and environmental safeguards through sustainable development.

The Malta Chamber noted with satisfaction that in reconsidering the location of this project, Government did not resort to the use of land designated for industrial purposes. Industrial land in Malta is, in fact, in very short supply and the Chamber reiterates its stand that such land should not be considered for any other purpose. On the other hand, the Chamber notes lack of detail in the announced plans with respect to the project brief and safeguards necessary to prohibit any change of use of the project. Such safeguards are rendered all the more necessary in view of the prime sites being committed.

Going forward and for the sake of good governance, the Chamber recommends that Government puts to good use the knowledge acquired from the current process to finalise a strategy that clearly identifies possible areas and locations to accommodate large-scale FDI projects in such a way that these dovetail with existent local plans so as to ensure a holistic approach to planning issues.

Finally, while MEPA should establish a set of sustainable development standards for all projects, but certainly for ones of this magnitude to follow, the Malta Chamber calls on Government to oblige the investor to neutralise the environmental cost, with positive sustainable practices. This could include the use of recycled materials in the Żonqor building, as well as other energy efficiency measures that would reduce the building's carbon footprint on the environment.

Considering all the above, the Malta Chamber appreciates the efforts to revise plans to locate the project in question and calls for special attention to detail at implementation stage in order to ascertain that environmental impact is kept to a minimum.

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