



MEETING MARLENE MIZZI – FIRST MAGAZINE – MAY 2009

What is your vision of Malta in the European Union?

The EU is an important economic block to which Malta belongs. Membership includes both rights and obligations. I believe that Malta can benefit greatly from membership if we are clever and capable enough to exploit and explore all possible opportunities that membership offers in terms of funds, rights, and improvement of standards in all spheres of society.

Malta can only send 5, maybe 6 MEPs to the European Parliament. Does that make Malta too tiny to play a significant role European politics?

The fact that we are small should not put us off exercising all our full rights as members of the EU. Yes we are small but we are also a nation of capable, hardworking and clever people. Size should not matter in this case, especially since we belong to larger groups in the EU such as the PES.

Do you believe that Malta has really benefited from joining the EU or would our country have been better off had it steered away from full membership?

Like everything else there are pros and cons. We must do our best to minimise the cons and enhance the pros of membership. I always believed that it is better for Malta to be in rather than out, of the EU. I did not think it was the heaven or the hell that politicians preached. We have to work hard at abiding with the obligations of membership as well as for its benefits and opportunities.

You have been hailed in some newspaper articles as a moderate. Do you consider yourself one?

I am capable of acknowledging what is right as being right, and what is wrong as being wrong irrespective of who does it. I use my own mind to think and not anybody else's. I express my agreements or my disagreements freely and am of independent mind. I think that it is these attributes which earned me the description of being a moderate. So yes I am and hope to always remain so!

You were described in a Malta Institute of Management publication as “a woman with a clear vision and exceptional leadership style.” Do you think that your proven leadership skills will give you a good standing as an MEP?

I think that an effective MEP should come with a good baggage of experience, vision, academic qualifications and assertiveness, as

well as sincere intentions of working hard. I have occupied a number of top level managerial positions and fortunately earned the respect of most persons I worked with, so my leadership style must be ok too!

Can you briefly describe your average working day?

I wake up around 7.30 am go straight to the computer; mid-morning is dedicated either to house visits or meeting with my campaign manager and team; after lunch is dedicated to answering emails, face book and reading the papers; early afternoon its back on the campaign trail doing door to door visits: late even back on the computer for further work. The Bed has become such a wonderful place to be!

How did you manage to fit in your busy working life with the needs of your family, especially when your daughter was still young?

It was not easy, but as my husband was appointed to the judiciary when our daughter, Alexandra, was still very young, so he used to be at home in the afternoons when she came back from school, while I was still at work. She always found a parent at home, so my mind was at rest. Also I am fortunate that I have husband who supports my carrier ambitions as I do his, and this relieved the stress of our crazy life style and helpful grandparents.

Can you tell me what, according to you, are your own best and worst character traits?

Best: I am honest and straight forward

Worse: I am very hard headed

You recently wrote, “We count on them [politicians] being decent, honest, temperate and moderate (Times of Malta, 21 Feb, 2009). Do you sincerely believe in the honest politician who will put duty before personal gain?

Yes of course that this is possible. I am one of them and say so without a trace of modesty. I have joined politics to serve and not to gain. I was very comfortable in my private life especially where time factor is concerned. Now I have no time for my family for my business or for myself and do not envisage this to change if I get elected to the EP. But I am prepared to do it if my representation will be of benefit to my country.

You wrote that: “My principles are not negotiable.” By contrast, author Phyllis Mc Ginley wrote: “Compromise, if not the spice of life, is its solidity. It is what makes nations great and marriages happy.” Do you think that sometimes personal principles should give way to compromise to achieve a win-win situation in important issues where negotiating skills are necessary?

Principles should never be waived as principles are the very foundations of integrity. To compromise one must not necessarily give up ones principles. Compromise can be achieved by adjusting ones opinions and expectations to someone else’s and be tolerant of different views from ones own. Holding on to ones principles and compromise are not mutually exclusive concepts.

“In the European Parliament I will fight for what is ours by right,” you wrote in Malta Today (Jan 4, 2009). Concretely, how do you intend to fight for the right of the Maltese people within the European Parliament?

As an MEP elected by the Maltese electorate I am duty bound to work in the interest of the Maltese people, always keeping in mind that we are part of a large group called the EU. There are rights which are still not available to us- such as the right to cross-border health care. The concrete way to fight for these rights is to lobby with both the EU parliament, with the help of the PES to which the Labour party MEPs are affiliated, as well as with the local Government, for these changes and upgrades to be adopted.

What benefits are we Maltese missing as EU members?

We are mainly missing on the general upgrade to EU standards. These would include anything from better roads to inclusive and complete education, from timely healthcare to having adequate structures supporting women who wish to pursue a job or a career, from equal representation in decision making positions to animal welfare laws. There is still so much for us to benefit from our membership and we are still a long way off.

Illegal immigration is a very sensitive issue and many politicians are uncomfortable talking about it. You have voiced very strong opinions in your website. Don't you think that your views are very congruent with far right views?

Malta is a small island which can no longer sustain the strain that the ever increasing numbers of illegal immigrants landing on our shores. From a purely humanistic point of view I pity these poor souls, who risk lives and limbs to leave their country in search of a better life elsewhere, but on the other hand, charity starts at home and we can no longer carry the burden these persons are putting on the country. In addition I am afraid that the influx of these people is proving to have consequences on the health and safety aspects of our society. In this regards I feel that the EU has left us to our own devices and are turning their face away from the problem letting us fend for ourselves. This is not on. The PL has tabled a very exhaustive Plan of Action in Parliament for discussion and has urged the Government to discuss the points of this plan in search of a solution.

The global economic crisis is presenting a great challenge to countries around the world. How in you view can Malta weather the storm and stay afloat?

The economic crisis is hitting us and it will most probably get worse before it will start on the recovery route. We have a solid banking structure and robust regulatory system in place which goes far in damage control of fiscal and monetary disasters. The Government cannot act as a book- keeper – seeking only to balance its books. The government is first and foremost the guardian of the wellbeing of its citizens and if this is done by worsening the deficit, then so be it. At this point in time money needs to be pumped into the economy; this is no time to impost taxes or increase utility bills- particularly at a time when jobs are

being lost on a daily basis. Having said so, I would like to believe that Malta will weather this storm well, even if this recession is the worst in the last 50 years.

Are you optimistic or pessimistic about Malta's future prospects?.

I am a realist skewed towards optimist. I believe in the talents and capabilities of the Maltese people but also acknowledge that we could have gone much further if we were not so obsessed with politics and on destroying what the other side has done, just because it is the other side that has done it!

You give priority to the environment in your electoral manifesto. Don't you think that measures that protect the environment are often unpopular with people as they involve changes of lifestyle and expenses?

We have to accept that taking care of the environment has a cost and a hefty one. The long term consequences of not undertaking these expenses must be weighed against the cost of a ruined environment for generations to come. True some of the measures required are unpopular with the people and intense education programmes are required to make people realise the importance of safeguarding the environment.

You mention the need of supporting single mothers who want to pursue a career. However, there is a sector of society who thinks that such measures are unfair on working married mothers, as

they have to pay the costs. How would you reply to such arguments?

There are always two sides of the same coin. Society is made up of persons with different needs and the state is duty bound to take into account the wellbeing of each and every one of its citizens. This is of course easier said than done. Single mothers have very real problems with bringing up their children and giving them a dignified living – apart from dealing with their own emotional problems. It is easier to take on an 'I'm alright Jack' attitude but this means that we are emarginating a section of our society and this not right.

You have garnered respect from unexpected quarters. Daphne Caruana Galizia wrote of you and Dr George Abela (Blog, Sunday 31 Aug, 2008): "On the positive side, Labour's list will probably include George Abela and Marlene Mizzi, both of whom are excellent choices, and neither of whom can be said to be an opportunist lunging headlong for that gravy train, armed with roughly two brain cells, years of experience in Super One 'newsroom' and in Testaferrata Street, and no principles or understanding of policy." How do you feel being lauded by Labour Party critics?

It always very satisfying when someone writes or says something good about you.

You wrote: "I firmly believe that the choice of who should run organisations should be based on competencies and capabilities

and not on whether one is male or female.” (The Business Times, 20-26 June, 2001). I know you are a staunch believer in gender equality. However, according to the Labour Party statute, at least of the candidates running for MEP office should be women. Isn't such a move patronising considering that women like you (with your ability and experience in management and business) need no such positive discrimination measures to achieve success? What are your views on this?

I have never made it a secret that I am not in favour of the quota system as I think that his concept backfires on women themselves. I believe in meritocracy and that jobs and positions should be occupied with capable persons irrespective of their gender. This does not mean that I do not appreciate the concept behind affirmative action to help the advancement of women. But this must only be on a temporary basis. I just wish this were not necessary at all. Personally I will never accept a position if I was being used as a token female to fulfil statutory requirements.

Some see you as one of the *new faces* of a reformed and more progressive *Labour* that is veering away from its traditional militant methods and blind opposition to any government actions. You have been described as *Europhile and moderate* (MT – Sun, Jan 4, 2009). Would you agree with this view about yourself, and would you promote competence, accountability and a more subtle approach to politics within the Labour Party?

I AM a new face, I AM a Europhile, and I AM moderate. These are the traits I bring to the Labour party and these are the traits that

Joseph Muscat saw when he invited me to join his party and to represent it in the EP. I think that competence and accountability are very important in public offices, as is integrity. The PL new leadership is already showing a more subtle and progressive approach to politics, but this does not mean that it should not be a strong Opposition and this in the interest of democracy.

You wrote: “Social responsibility is about leadership that takes its decisions after debating and consulting properly with the people it represents (T.O.M. – Sat, 21 Feb, 2009). Your approach to leading is very democratic. If you sincerely believed that a necessary but unpopular law is necessary for the long-term benefit of our country, would you still support it knowing, after consultation, that many people are dead against it?

Vox populi, vox dei. in most cases. However, one has to acknowledge the fact that there are a number of instances where a decisions have to be taken for the common good well knowing that it will be an unpopular decision on an individual basis. The decision impose taxes is an obvious example. Taking difficult decisions which prove to be the right decisions in the long run is the proof of good leadership. Also a good leader knows that he/she cannot please everyone all the time.