

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **An Airstrip for Gozo**

Should Gozo have an airstrip? This question was brought up, once again, by the Hon. Dr. Mario De Marco, Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism, the Environment and Culture, during a recent conference on “Innovation in Island Tourism” organised by the GRTU. The business community in Gozo as well as representatives from other walks of life, have voiced their opinion in favour of the project.

The President of the Gozo Business Chamber, who attended the conference, said in his intervention that this is a question of “when” and not of “if”. The GBC, together with other regional bodies, has been stating for a long time the project is long overdue and that our island needs this vital air link to offer better direct means of communication with Malta International Airport (MIA). This will translate Gozo ‘s dream of being sold as a distinct destination into a reality. Besides other benefits, a direct link will boost foreign direct investment in Gozo.

At a conference on European and Malta Attractiveness Surveys 2009, organised by Ernst & Young, it was pointed out that a survey among 101 foreign investors who were asked whether their company considered investing in Gozo, the replies were 91% ‘No’, 8% ‘Yes’, and 1% ‘Can’t Say’. The foremost reason quoted for not investing in Gozo was the missing air link which means “more travel times and costs” and that “clients coming from abroad would be reluctant to travel to Gozo for a meeting”.

Another survey conducted by the NSO (Jan 2010) ‘Tourist Statistical Review’ clearly shows that Gozo only enjoys 3.8% of all inbound tourists to Malta in winter. Gozo surely deserves a better share to encourage business opportunities to flourish and sustain the present infrastructure. We all know that Gozo, much more than Malta, suffers from erratic cycles of high traffic between the islands in the summer months and long weekends and very low traffic in the shoulder and lean months which create an economic vacuum in between.

The GBC believes that the airstrip is not the only project that Gozitans are longing for. However, it will surely contribute to the growth of tourism and economic prosperity.

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