

Address given by Edward Fenech Adami on the accession of Malta to the EU (15 February 2000)

Caption: On 15 February 2000, Edward Fenech Adami, Maltese Prime Minister, considers the plus points of the Republic of Malta's accession to the European Union.

Source: Prime Minister's Speeches, Why Europe now (15 February 2000). [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: Department of Information - Government of Malta, [19.05.2005]. Available on http://www.doi.gov.mt/EN/press_releases/2000/02/pr0181.asp.

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Speech by Edward Fenech Adami (15 February 2000)

Why Europe now

Europe has been a reality which has influenced our nation's affairs since well before our nation achieved independence thirty six years ago. Inevitably, however, over the past year the European theme has become ever more prominent in our politics, demanding ever more media attention.

Today we start negotiating our country's entry into the European Union, a process which will transform the 'European' element in our national identity from the merely 'descriptive' to the profoundly 'functional' when we join our European partners in their (and soon to be, our) shared institution.

Negotiations are the final phase in a process that started with Malta's application ten years ago, in 1990. The fundamental reasons why we want to join the Union have remained as clear as they were at the time of our original decision to apply for membership. Put formally, we are in favour of European Union membership because it is in Malta's national interests.

Firstly, EU membership will enhance Malta's already high degree of economic integration with EU countries. This is because EU membership will guarantee complete access to a market which is several times larger than that of our own. Although Malta has to date depended heavily on the EU for imports and exports, it still lacks the guarantee of free and total access. This freedom is fundamental to EU membership. The present conditions which limit us when doing business in European countries are a trading handicap we can no longer afford. They are basically endangering the jobs of the thousands that work in private industry.

Secondly, membership in the EU will create the right atmosphere for increased inward flows of foreign direct investment. This will be a result of a combination of elements that exist already, or will otherwise occur as a result of membership: the guarantee of access to the EU market on the one hand and, on the other, the Maltese work force: highly trained, used to high tech investments and always willing to learn new skills. We also expect EU membership to provide the necessary platform to widely project the advantages of investing in Malta, to countries outside the EU in which Malta and its qualities are still relatively undiscovered. Over time, this will mean the creation of thousands of new jobs.

Thirdly, as an EU member state, Malta will be able to play a much more effective part in the development of the economic and cultural networks between Euro Mediterranean countries. We expect our country to be an active player in the evolution of such activities, exploiting much better our strategic geographic location at the centre of the Mediterranean. Again, new opportunities to bring prosperity to Malta.

Finally, EU membership will give Malta a competitive edge in the area of high tech investment, particularly with respect to small enterprises which engage in innovation and technological development. The EU's commitment to promoting these sectors is well known, particularly through initiatives on research and technological development as well as in the importance that it attaches to the development of e commerce. Malta is well placed to exploit this area of increasing importance, particularly since it can already rely on a sound material and educational infrastructure as well as on an ever growing entrepreneurial class which is not only dynamic but is eager to exploit new opportunities. Again, new opportunities to bring new jobs to Malta.

Our country will be one of the smaller members of the European Union, but we know well enough that the smaller countries have been among those who benefited most from EU membership just look at the Irish and Luxembourg experiences. We want to ensure that the prospects and opportunities that are available to other Europeans are made equally available to the Maltese business community and to the Maltese workforce. In so doing, we are creating an environment which is conducive to good business both for local and foreign entrepreneurs. We want to attain a market economy which prospers on competition and openness to Europe and to the world. This is the logical progress on the economic and political growth of our country. It is anything but anyone's personal agenda.

Put simply, those of us who have long been in favour of EU membership are so in favour because we believe and have always believed that our people have the right to best jobs available and they have the right to the same opportunities as the rest of Europe. Furthermore, we continue to be totally convinced that we Maltese are perfectly capable of turning these rights into real prosperity.

Of course, we cannot reduce the national interest solely to the issue of prosperity, although it is a crucial aspect of it. Neither is prosperity the only reason why the EU exists. But, as we know from our past, prosperity depends on security and the respect for human rights just as much as security and the respect for human rights themselves depend on prosperity and fairness in its distribution.

The European Union acts as a living guarantee that never again shall there be such a gap in the distribution of wealth that a European country envies a neighbour to the extent that it feels it should fight it at war. Never again shall there be a break down of democracy such that in our continent maniacs and dictators strip citizens of rights and, even, of their life. Recent events have shown that the EU actively ensures that this does not happen. The consequences of a war in Europe for us do not need to be spelt out. It is not that long ago that our country suffered heavily in such circumstances. It is, therefore, obviously in our national interests that peace, along with prosperity, are preserved throughout Europe, to which we belong.

The European Union is no Utopia. It is itself a system of government and as such lives through issues and challenges that need resolving. That is no reason to look away from it. When the fear mongers hiss at the huge, occasionally inefficient bureaucracy of the EU, they point at an issue that should be faced and solved; rather than simply hissed at. Our country has its own inefficiencies and our Government faces challenges and comes up with solutions for the, admittedly not always to everybody's liking. That is certainly no reason to suggest we should have no Government at all. On the national level, as on the European level, politicians have the responsibility of dealing actively with challenges and producing solutions ; not run away from them.

The European Union is ready and set for the challenge of enlargement that will double it in size ; it will need to work hard: update its institutions; reform the treaties that found it; find ways of assisting the new members to make themselves feel at home. Malta is ready and set too. We know what we have to do to be up to scratch on day one of membership, and we know we can do it. Today, we are at the start line.