

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS - John Bencini – MALTA.

The term 'sustainable development' is one of the most misused and abused *is in* political discourse. It is generally used in the wrong context and, as a result, sends a wrong message. Sustainable development refers to development which has a long-term view, that is a view that considers and addresses long-term impacts. In particular, it signifies development which ensures that resources are carefully used so that the interests of future generations are taken into consideration. This is not just matter of environment concern- it is an inter-twining of environmental, economic, social and cultural policy. It means that our actions must take the long-term view and be simultaneously compatible with the forces of nature, the economy, human development and a respect for culture. Sustainable development is about living in harmony with all that surrounds us, at all times. It is about treating our surroundings as part of our family.

There is no simplistic way to assess sustainable development, and the widespread perception that it is all about the environment, is completely wrong. Sustainable development is what meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. However this is as complex as it is straightforward.

The Conventional way of describing sustainable development is through its so-called three pillars – economic growth, social-rights and well-being and environmental protection. This is the only way that Sustainable Development may be achieved, theoretically, at least, when the right balance between these three is achieved.

As far as Maltese Legislation is concerned, the Sustainable Development has been enshrined six years ago to create a framework through which sustainable development is to be mainstreamed across Government. This was also accompanied by another effort to integrate education for sustainable development through a national policy framework.

Malta is on the right track on the three pillars mentioned above but there is always much food for thought. The United Nations has set specific landmarks in the form of over 200 indicators, statistical analysis of which should enable the policy maker the Sustainable Development goals are being met. This reflects how a country is moving along a social-economic path that truly respects the need to achieve the right balance between the three pillars and thus guarantee prosperity and improve quality of life. Malta scores very high and positively so on the eradication of poverty.

The un-employment Ratio in Malta is only 3.5% and it is among the lowest in the E.U. actually second place together with Germany after first place the Czech Republic. The number of employment among persons with disability has increased enormously and Government has just declared that persons with Disability who for genuine reasons are unable to work will be receiving an allowance equal to Malta's minimum wage. Every year on budget day, the Government continues to increase pensions and this is due to the fact that the Country has a very strong economy from a deficit situation to surplus. The problem Malta is now facing is lack of workers and no wonder then that the numbers of foreign workers, mostly from E.U. countries has increased tremendously. We score highly on industry and infrastructure and on gender equality. The Government is also engaged in major investments in our road network to improve accessibility and transport and hence reduce the economic burden that is daily being incurred as a consequence of traffic congestion.

More can be done in terms of safeguarding bio-diversity, sadly, it is one aspect of environment that rarely features as prominently as air quality in political party manifestos. The population is deeply concerned about the air we breathe. A lot of progress has been made concerning waste management and

recycling. The voices of concern raised by individuals and stake-holders, particularly in land use and excessive construction must be heard and judiciously addressed. Renting of apartments has become a nightmare but Government has a few months ago embarked on more social housing and has issued a white paper on the subject of rents. . It is however important to point that 79% of the people in Malta own their house.

Sustainable development and Social Pillars are a worldwide challenge. It unavoidable becomes far more complicated within the context of small island states. Satisfactory as Malta ranking may look, it does not warrant public or private enterprise to take sustainable issues for granted.