

Malta Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise
Malta Federation of Industry
Malta Employers' Association
Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association
GRTU Association of General Retailers and Traders

22 January 2005

Media Release

Constituted bodies issue a joint Media Statement on
Public Holidays Issue

The Malta Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise, the Malta Federation of Industry, the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association, the GRTU and the Malta Employers' Association issued a joint statement to explain the developments that occurred at the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development regarding the public holidays issue. The bodies said that following the budget speech whereby the Government introduced the measure to remove public holidays that fall on a weekend, which was rejected by the unions, they agreed to take part in MCESD talks on the basis that the unions would propose an alternative measure that would still have the same impact on the country's competitiveness and productivity.

The proposals submitted by the unions re-opened a number of points that were previously being discussed within the context of a social pact, but still did not reach the intended result. Employers made it clear at MCESD that they would continue to participate in such discussions provided that the issue of public holidays is solved first and used as a basis for further negotiations that might lead to a social pact. The unions refused this position.

In spite of a suggestion made by the Parliamentary Secretary Mr. Tonio Fenech, whereby there would be a reduction in optional annual vacation leave of two days as part of an overall package for a Social Pact that would include other measures, the unions remained adamant to reopen all the issues related to the social pact without any commitment on measures concerning leave. On the other hand, employer bodies showed good faith and accepted the recommendation by the parliamentary secretary to unblock the situation. The refusal by the unions created an impasse and as a result led to a breakdown in the discussions.

The constituted bodies stated that the measure on public holidays is the least that government could have taken towards improving productivity, and that on its own, will be insufficient to solve the country's economic problems. The country needs to introduce concrete measures to safeguard current employment and to generate new jobs. The way the budget measure has been turned into a controversy does not augur well for an improved economic scenario. The constituted bodies expect the unions to show a deeper appreciation of economic realities in the interest of their members and the country as a whole.