

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ AN AONTAIS EORPAIGH

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN UNION AFFAIRS

Dé Céadaoin, 7 Nollaig 2016

Wednesday, 7 December 2016

The Joint Committee met at 2 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Colm Brophy,	Senator Gerard P. Craughwell,
Deputy Seán Crowe,	Senator Terry Leyden,
Deputy Bernard J. Durkan,	Senator Neale Richmond.
Deputy Seán Haughey,	
Deputy Mattie McGrath,	
Deputy Frank O'Rourke,	

DEPUTY MICHAEL HEALY-RAE IN THE CHAIR.

Member States' Position on UK Withdrawal from EU: Maltese Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Chairman: I remind members to ensure their mobile phones are switched off. This is important as it causes serious problems for broadcasting, editorial and sound staff.

First, we will engage with Ms Helga Mizzi, Director General of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Malta. On behalf of the committee, I welcome Ms Helga Mizzi to our meeting today. She has travelled all the way from Malta to be with us and we are very grateful to her for the efforts she has made to be here today. She is very welcome to Ireland. The committee is continuing to work towards trying to understand the priorities and positions of our fellow European member states in all our preparations for the negotiations for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. Malta is about to take on a big role in these discussions as it will take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 January. Most of our engagement with Ms Mizzi today will be about Brexit but she might also like to make a few comments about Malta's Presidency plans. I note the warning to witnesses regarding privilege, which we all know. I invite Ms Mizzi to make her opening remarks and I will then open the floor to questions.

Ms Helga Mizzi: I thank the Chairman and the esteemed members of the committee. I want to extend my gratitude for the invitation to me to address the committee on issues which feature front and centre on Malta's agenda, as well as on the EU's agenda, given they will naturally have a lasting impact on the Union and its citizens. The timing of my visit to Dublin could not have been more opportune, given how our two Prime Ministers discussed many of the same issues we will be discussing today during Prime Minister Muscat's visit to Ireland on 28 November as part of a Presidency-related *tour des capitales*. Our Prime Ministers discussed Brexit and a raft of other matters related to the EU and it came as no surprise to many to note how like-minded our two countries are and how we both seek out solutions which are practical and European, wherever possible.

This is the frame of mind with which we are approaching what promises to be a very challenging new year. The first half of 2017 will not merely be the first EU Presidency led by Malta but it will also be the first time the EU will initiate negotiations for the withdrawal of a member state. This is a convergence that has necessitated diligent and careful planning in Valletta. Unsurprisingly, Brexit has taken up a good share of the bandwidth.

As committee members know, over the past four decades the UK has played an instrumental role within the EU, characterised by an important contribution towards shaping the Union's political thinking and strategies. Now that Brexit looms large, the UK's withdrawal from a Union it helped to shape affects not just the UK but has repercussions for all of the member states of the EU 27, including Malta. Over the years, the excellent ties, deeply-rooted in history, between Malta and the UK have fostered a relationship that transcends the political and economic spheres. This is a bond that has developed even further during the past few decades through the enhancement of our bilateral relations, as well as our relations within regional and international fora, most notably within the EU and the Commonwealth.

Similar to Ireland, Malta is keen to preserve the four freedoms for Maltese citizens *vis-à-vis* the UK as much as possible. We are very conscious of the fact this is going to be a crucial issue, both for the UK and for the EU. Above all, we do not see this as an issue of numbers of people but more as a matter of principle. The bottom line is that there cannot be access to the Single

Market without the freedom of movement of persons. Malta is closely monitoring events in the run-up to the Brexit negotiations with a view to identifying the main areas of concern, not only for Malta but also for the EU as a whole, as well as the individual member states, with the aim of having priorities and red lines reflected in the European Council guidelines. We will be closely looking at Brexit negotiations while also bearing in mind areas of mutual bilateral interest with the UK to, hopefully, pre-empt any negative ramifications that may cascade as a consequence of Brexit.

It remains to be seen how the negotiations with the UK will develop in practice because there can be no negotiations before notification. After Article 50 is triggered, the potential impact the UK's withdrawal may have on the bilateral aspect of UK-Maltese ties will become clearer. In this regard, Malta will try to ensure that bilateral agreements with the UK that were in existence prior to Malta's EU accession, will be kept and, if possible, reinforced in light of the developments resulting from our 12 years of EU membership.

An evident priority which Malta intends to safeguard as much as possible is the interest of Maltese nationals in the UK. There is a five generations-strong Maltese community in the UK and we will do everything within our power to ensure that their interests are duly safeguarded.

During its tenure as President of the Council of the EU, Malta will lend its good offices wherever possible and fulfil a role which is definitely not new to us - that of being a constructive and honest broker. While it would not be prudent to rush unduly, it is essential that the EU does not delay negotiations as this might lead to misinterpretation that could harm the EU's credibility. Very importantly, people living both in the UK and in the EU 27 deserve to know where they will stand following Brexit and any consequences they may experience or changes they might need to undertake.

We need to start actively planning for a life beyond Brexit even though there are still a number of questions that need to be answered. The one definite thing we can say with certainty even at this stage is that, ultimately, being outside the EU must be inferior to actual EU membership. While the EU 27 should be kept involved and informed throughout the negotiation process, it is also crucial that Commissioner Barnier, as the Commission's chief negotiator, is afforded the time and space to enable him to fulfil his role.

The UK will still be a part of Europe, whether it is inside the EU or outside it. As EU member states it will be essential that we maintain a common approach in regard to the challenges facing us and co-operate together in the interest of a Europe which is whole and free.

Recent events and the prevailing uncertainty in the international scenario have confirmed the importance of unity within the EU, which is key to safeguarding our common values and aspirations. Brexit has undoubtedly underscored the increasingly urgent need to start a serious discussion on how to make the Union better and more efficient for all EU citizens. We need to bridge the perceived gap between Brussels and the man on the street and we cannot lose sight of the fact that the EU was created for its citizens. The role of parliamentarians such as yourselves is of course vital in this regard and I am happy to confirm that throughout Malta's six-month Presidency, regaining the EU citizens' trust will be a top priority.

In this vein, I will now take the opportunity to brief this esteemed committee on some of the major priorities throughout our Presidency. Apart from Brexit, the Maltese Presidency will face a number of other challenges and opportunities. Discussions on the new concept of Europe initiated in Bratislava will continue to be taken forward during our Presidency. Within this con-

text, Malta is currently in discussions with President Tusk's team and is making the necessary preparations in view of the summit which Malta will be hosting to discuss the future of Europe in February 2017. The Malta summit will not be focussed entirely and exclusively on Brexit.

There is an EU agenda and the Union needs to give it due consideration and look ahead. The Malta summit will therefore be an excellent opportunity for member states to gain some further traction on this new vision for Europe. It will build on the Bratislava process and lay the groundwork for Rome.

The situation in our neighbourhood remains precarious with political instability in candidate countries, violence and socio-economic problems in the southern neighbourhood, and a volatile and unstable situation in the east. The Middle East peace process, a dossier which is so close to Malta's heart as it is to Ireland's, remains moribund and seems to have stalled. Within this context, Malta will be giving substantial attention to the European neighbourhood policy, which can play a vital role in improving the daily lives of people in the region.

Irregular migration has been one of the main and most obvious consequences of this turmoil. Tackling this phenomenon in an effective manner requires a twofold approach. We need to identify and address the root causes of migration and then also act to prevent loss of life at sea while destroying the network of human smugglers and traffickers. To this effect, on 8 and 9 February 2017, Malta will be hosting the Joint Valletta Action Plan senior officials' meeting, which will include the participation both of EU member states as well as African countries. This meeting is expected to take stock of the progress made in the implementation of the Valletta action plan and should shed light on the way ahead for the Valletta mechanism.

Being an island, like Ireland, Malta will treat maritime affairs with a similar degree of importance, giving political guidance through an integrated maritime policy encompassing areas such as the marine environment, nautical tourism and the blue economy. The Maltese Presidency will also be giving a great deal of attention to the internal market as the Union's greatest asset, along with the concept of social inclusion.

The security of our citizens is another key issue. Over the past year, we have seen a worrying increase in terrorist attacks across Europe that are having a devastating effect on our citizens and our countries. Despite setbacks in some quarters, enlargement remains the EU's most effective foreign policy tool in bringing about security, stability and good governance in the European neighbourhood. Malta will ensure that the western Balkans remain at the very centre of the Union's work in this field, as it is in our interests to speed up integration so that the stability which our citizens enjoy continues to extend to the broader region.

In spite of the challenges I have alluded to, Malta remains hopeful that a bright future for the EU lies ahead. There have been several occasions in the recent past which showed that seemingly unsurmountable challenges can, in fact, pave the way for new opportunities and avenues of co-operation. The EU Global Strategy can prove to be one such example. It is now up to us to move on with its implementation and translate words into action. In today's very fitting framework, I would also like to mention that Malta shares Ireland's view that long-term plans on this front will need to keep in full view the specific security and defence characteristics of individual member states.

Having an ambitious European Union must necessitate a recognition that the importance of diplomacy, dialogue and confidence-building measures can never be undervalued. It is in this spirit that Malta will be organising an event that brings together EU foreign ministers, Southern

Partners and representatives from the Gulf Co-operation Council countries in April 2017. The time is ripe for us to bolster our relationship and move towards an enhanced dialogue with our immediate neighbours and with our neighbours' neighbours. It is our intention to provide an ideal forum for a constructive discussion on issues such as culture, education, youth and inter-faith dialogue in a more intimate and relaxed environment.

Allow me to conclude now by underlining the fact that as it prepares for one of the greatest challenges in its diplomatic history, Malta will look to Ireland as a steadfast, like-minded and reliable partner within the EU. Ours is a relationship based on common values, shared histories and similar characteristics and approaches, which the committee can rest assured Malta will continue to carry forward as actively as it can.

Chairman: I thank Ms Mizzi for that comprehensive overview. Together with other members of the committee, I am glad to hear about the preparations Malta is making for the EU summit and the other meetings, as outlined. Getting together and organising a work programme for the EU Presidency is important. I now call on Senator Richmond to contribute to the discussion.

Senator Neale Richmond: I thank Ms Mizzi for her excellent address which is much appreciated. I wish to pick up on a few issues by asking a couple of questions and making some points. The first concerns Malta's forthcoming EU Presidency and I wish Ms Mizzi luck for what will be a very busy year, as I know that elections are scheduled for Malta in 2017. She rightly mentioned Malta's efforts to rebuild civic trust in the EU, which is vitally important. What are the Presidency's plans to reach out to the citizens of Europe? When we held the Presidency in 2013 we had a number of very active civic dialogues, which worked well, but the key thing for us to do in order for us to try to re-promote the EU and address the populism of both the left and the right is to engage with citizens, refine the EU, be clear what the EU is about and take on board people's concerns. We have talked about the concerns and people veering towards populism but now we must begin to act.

How does Ms Mizzi feel the Presidency will be able to drive the trade policies of the Union over the next six months? TTIP, alas, is dead in the water with the election of Mr. Trump, in addition to considerable opposition here but especially on the Continent, but there are opportunities in Australia, New Zealand and with the Mercosur region and the Far East. How can we prioritise those area and bring the trade deals on-stream?

I am sure a number of my colleagues will express the same concerns on Brexit as everyone who has come before the committee share, namely, the unique situation Ireland - North and South - face going into the negotiation process. While we fully respect all the UK-Maltese arrangements prior to accession, there are a number of Anglo-Irish agreements that also need to be respected. Our main hope is that we can both work together to avoid an overly hard Brexit. I do not think it is in either country's interests.

I am in a very small minority in both Houses, and in society in general, in that I believe Ireland rejoining the Commonwealth would be a good thing. I am aware that Malta is to take over the leadership of that body next year. From her diplomatic experience could Ms Mizzi give us detail about how membership of the Commonwealth works for Malta, the opportunities that lie ahead and how a potential future application from Ireland would be received by Commonwealth members?

Deputy Seán Crowe: I bid Ms Mizzi a céad míle fáilte, a hundred thousand welcomes.

Like other speakers I wish her every success in Malta's Presidency of the EU for the first six months of 2017.

We have had a number of guest speakers coming before the committee and prior to the Brexit vote some of us met with several British politicians who were for and against the issue. Many of the politicians we have met are clearly of the understanding that the UK will get a very good deal from Brexit. There is almost arrogance among some individuals who feel the world cannot do without the UK and that things would collapse without British involvement. Former senior British Cabinet members still have a certain view of their country's place in the world. Ms Mizzi indicated in her speech that the situation of the UK would not be better post-Brexit. The position many countries in Europe are adopting is that the post-Brexit situation will not be a good thing for the people of the UK.

The biggest priority from our perspective is that there would not be a huge negative impact on the island of Ireland. We see it as a disaster for the Irish people which might compound the divisions on the island of Ireland and impact on the Good Friday Agreement. It will create uncertainty, fear and division and we are already seeing the outworkings of that.

Michel Barnier, the EU negotiator, said he has an understanding of the Irish situation because of his background as European Commissioner for Regional Policy at one stage and that he knows the unique circumstances of Ireland. We share jurisdiction of a disputed border with the UK and Brexit could impact and cause difficulty in that regard.

Many of us are concerned about the impact of Brexit on people. Any British withdrawal from membership of the EU implies huge challenges for the entire island. Is the Government of Malta aware of the unique position of Ireland and the potential effect of Brexit on us compared to any other EU country? Witnesses have come before the committee and spoken of the huge sympathy for Ireland in regard to Brexit. Could Ms Mizzi expand on what such sympathy means? We want to examine all options to allow the North to remain within the EU. We will launch a policy document tomorrow on that issue.

Is there support in Malta for recognising Ireland's unique position? Ms Mizzi is no doubt aware the EU proved itself capable of accommodating unique circumstances in respect of Cyprus and Greenland. Denmark is an EU member state yet Greenland is outside the jurisdiction of the Union but it still receives European funding. The EU also became an active persuader for the reunification of Germany.

Malta's neighbour, Cyprus, in the event of reunification will be fully integrated into the EU. Seats in the EU Parliament are allocated on the basis of the entire population of Cyprus. Does Ms Mizzi believe that such flexibility could be shown to Ireland given the inherent right of those born on the island of Ireland to Irish citizenship or British citizenship and by virtue of that right they are citizens of the European Union as well? Would the Maltese Government be open to such a proposal?

Given the threat to the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process we believe there is a duty on all member states, but in particular the Irish Government as a member state of the European Union and a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement to support and safeguard the political constitution and legal integrity of the Agreement. The EU has played a positive role in the peace process, especially with funding for reconciliation projects. Does Ms Mizzi believe such positive political support will continue in the future?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Ms Mizzi is very welcome to Dublin. I thank her for her very informed presentation. I am concerned about a number of issues. I am aware there was a pre-EU bilateral agreement between Malta and the UK. It has been a central plank of the 27 member states that there would be no bilateral negotiations with the UK. I am not sure whether that is more about teaching the UK a lesson for being the naughty boy in class and leaving the EU without asking our permission or if it is a genuine attempt to act with a single European Union position dealing with an exiting country. I would be interested to hear if bilateral discussions have taken place between the UK and Malta already or if Malta intends to engage in bilateral discussions.

I concur with what Senator Richmond said about bridging the gap with the ordinary man on the street. With all due respect, politicians, both nationally and internationally, have been talking about that for generations, and it must be difficult to find those millions of people because the gap has not been bridged yet. The gap has given rise to the sort of thing we are seeing right across Europe and the United States, namely, the rise of the extreme left and the extreme right and the message has been lost somewhere in the middle of it all. That is something which greatly concerns me.

Defence is another issue that has been increasing in importance in Europe of late and I have some concerns about that. The position of Ireland is very clear: we are a neutral country and that is underpinned in the Constitution. We will not be involved in any European army or anything like it. However, in the context of defence, defence of the citizen is something in which I have a particular interest. Many of our thugs and criminals have moved to the Mediterranean, particularly to southern Spain, to operate from there. Is Malta interested in pursuing that agenda where we would join police forces to make the forces much stronger than they are currently? I know there is a lot of co-operation but maybe there is not enough.

Education is a problem for Ireland in particular because we have students moving between both jurisdictions. Students from the North of Ireland study in the South and *vice versa*. People move back and forth daily. That will be a huge problem given the soundings that I heard from the chief negotiator yesterday where he sort of said that he understood the Irish position but he did not exactly break his heart showing that he was going to try to find a solution to the Irish Border. One thing that is for certain is that the North of Ireland, if Brexit goes ahead, will be in another jurisdiction outside of the European Union and, regardless of whether we like it, there will be some form of Border, whether hard or soft. I cannot see any way in which the UK which has exited would have an open border with the Republic of Ireland, nor can I see any way that the Republic of Ireland would accept a border down along the Irish Sea that would segregate the island of Ireland from the UK. There would be a problem for the education sector, in particular for young people who travel across the two jurisdictions. Quite a number of students from Ireland go to Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Gloucester. There is significant crossing over and back in the education area.

In terms of the sympathy that people have for Ireland, sympathy only manifests itself when somebody produces a plan. I believe it will fall to Malta to get the plan in place. Tea and sympathy are no good in this situation. We need a clear plan that will facilitate the unique Irish problem. Malta, as an island nation that understands the UK and where UK residents have holidayed for quite a considerable period, as they have done here, understands the politics of this. Ireland needs more than tea and sympathy. We need a clear plan and Malta must put it in place.

In terms of the peace process, as my colleague has just adverted to, this island is recovering from a period of terrible turmoil and we now enjoy free movement to any part of the island.

People from the Republic of Ireland are only beginning to explore the North of Ireland, which is a beautiful part of the world. It would be my deepest concern that people from the EU 26, who really do not know this island or understand the cultures that exist on this island, would make decisions without taking the time to come here and learn a little bit more about them. I would be very anxious that Malta would constantly keep the Irish peace process on the agenda. It took us the best part of 50 years to get it to where it is. Let us not run the risk of losing it. I thank the witness for her time and apologise for asking so many questions.

Chairman: I thank the Senator. I call the Vice Chairman, Senator Terry Leyden, to comment.

Senator Terry Leyden: I welcome the director general, Ms Mizzi, to Ireland. I have visited Malta and know that it is a beautiful island.

Ms Mizzi mentioned in her contribution that there is a five generation strong Maltese community in Britain. I know from my experience of visiting Malta that an enormous number of British people have retired to the island. I do not know if Ms Mizzi has the numbers off hand or if she has an idea of the numbers involved. I expect that Maltese people are entitled to British passports under the agreement. Malta was very close to Britain and this relationship has continued. When Brexit takes place and Britain leaves the EU, what arrangement will there be for Maltese people in terms of entitlement to a British passport? Will Ms Mizzi indicate the position? A substantial number of Irish people live in Britain and they have certain rights as far as passports are concerned. Many British people have a right to an Irish passport. My query is not about citizenship but about movement and travel. I do not think the people who voted for Brexit were concerned about the British people who live in Europe or who have retired to various parts of Europe when it comes to funding and their rights.

Negotiations will take a long time and speculation is that they could take three or five years. Malta is the first country to hold the Presidency following the Brexit vote. I believe that Britain should not be left out of meetings as it is still a member of the European Union until the day a decision is made. Article 50 is only the start of the negotiations. It must be quite offensive to the British Government for it to be excluded from dinners organised by the European Union where 27 member states are invited to attend but not the British Prime Minister. That is not a good way to start negotiations. I suggest that goodwill should continue to be shown because we are going to work together, one way or the other, after Brexit. The relationship should be maintained as long as possible. As long as Britain contributes and pays into the EU, its political representatives are entitled to attend all meetings of the European Union.

Chairman: As there are no more contributions, I ask Ms Mizzi to make her concluding remarks.

Ms Helga Mizzi: I thank members for their wide array of questions. I will start with the concept of citizens. As most members have pointed out, there is a long way between theory and implementing this concept on the street and reaching out to the grassroots. We see the Presidency as a possible tool to do just that. Apart from obvious concerns, such as security and making citizens feel more secure, we are thinking of broadening the concept to other areas such as the Single Market where we would like to work in a concrete manner to substantiate the assistance given to small and medium-sized enterprises, which in most of our countries are the backbone of economies, especially in countries like ours that are not based on multinationals *per se*. We will also do this through the concept of social inclusion. We will work hard at having the EU being more inclusive in its approach, primarily but not exclusively on gender matters. We think

of these as grassroot issues that would, in one way or another, bring this monster or huge creation that is Brussels closer to the daily lives of citizens.

A valid point was made about free trade agreements. It is where the EU has registered a lot of success. It has managed to reach out to a lot of far-flung countries. We are closely following the negotiations that are taking place close to our region of the southern Mediterranean but also in faraway countries like Singapore that have promising potential. We would definitely not like to see a slowdown in momentum on that front.

In terms of the Commonwealth, Malta is the chair of the Commonwealth at present and a member of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, CMAG. Malta hosted its second summit last November and its first summit in 2005. In so far as benefits to Malta are concerned, and they do not necessarily apply to an Irish scenario, we have managed to come up with concrete proposals in terms of small state concerns *vis-à-vis* climate change. We contributed to the climate change declaration that was adopted in Paris. Malta adopted its own climate change declaration in November. We have also contributed to a revitalisation of the Commonwealth institution. We were very glad to host the summit only a few months back.

The Irish situation has formed part of the latest high level meetings at both prime ministerial and foreign ministers level. We have heard the scenarios in great detail. There is a growing understanding on the Maltese side of what the special agreement entails in terms of freedom of movement of persons. It is important that it prevails and that it is not hindered. I refer also to the very sensitive issue of the Good Friday Agreement. In so far as the Maltese understanding of the scenario goes, we are going straight to the source. Our Prime Minister was here only last week to hear the Irish concerns at the highest level. The committee can rest assured that this is very high on the agenda within the Brexit framework.

With regard to unity among 27 member states, there have not been any bilateral negotiations with the United Kingdom. As a Ministry, we are currently conducting an internal exercise with the United Kingdom that assesses the possible impacts, although we do not yet know what will be presented on the areas we deem to be of priority. These concern social affairs, the health sector and education. We have a number of tertiary level students pursuing their studies in the United Kingdom. Other priorities concern passports and the diaspora element. Right after the Brexit vote, we did hear some alarms sounding among other Community citizens in the United Kingdom. I cannot say there are phenomenal changes in the way they have been living their lives since June but there is an element of concern, of course, including in respect of tuition and studies. We will definitely be considering the interests of those in this category as a matter of priority. The figure we have in our records is that 80,000 citizens of Maltese origin are living in the United Kingdom. Of course, they all have a different history. Every generation has a very distinct history but we will be considering the position of the rather sizeable community as a matter of priority in the next few months.

We have not been engaged in high level bilateral negotiations with the United Kingdom. We are firm believers in the unity of the EU 27 and we do not believe there is any one country among the 27 that is currently questioning the concept. We intend to take that forward in our Presidency.

On defence, the Irish concerns are currently very close to ours in this domain. We have rather strict constitutional obligations back home that we tend to safeguard at every step and with every move forward taken in this respect. As the committee knows, the global strategy launched in July focuses on soft security and hard security, but also defence. We have no is-

sue with the soft security and hard security aspects of that vision, which we support fully, but we will be monitoring developments concerning the strict defence aspects very closely to ensure the safeguards are in line with treaty obligations in terms of recognition of constitutional obligations of individual member states and to ensure a distinction is maintained between a close partner to the European Union, such as NATO, and the EU common security and defence policy, CSDP, operations themselves. This is a very important dossier. This development is relatively new, dating from July. It came at a very sensitive moment for the European Union. It was launched barely four or five days after the results of the Brexit referendum were known. We are very hopeful about its success.

With regard to passports, I do not believe anything has changed thus far. Those eligible to hold a Maltese passport by way of relation still have an automatic right to one. I do not believe we will be encountering any major shifts in the present policy as it stands. I refer to the general approach we are taking on diaspora matters. There is a sizeable Maltese expatriate community in the United Kingdom. Most would regard Malta as a place of retirement. Malta has a large number of tourists from the United Kingdom and *vice versa*. The United Kingdom is the most popular country among outgoing tourists. The links on a people-to-people level are very visible and tangible.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: One of the common features we encounter when talking to people from the member states is the issue of the Single Market. The Single Market seems to work very well in the areas of agriculture and fisheries and in various other sectors. Ms Mizzi cannot have missed - perhaps she did - the crowd outside the gates of Leinster House today protesting in respect of the drug Orkambi. We had similar protests about other drugs designed to treat cancer. It amazes me that an Irish citizen can go to Spain to purchase his entire drug requirement for a particular illness. I am mindful of a character who went to Spain and bought his blood pressure tablets for the entire year for something like €14 or €15. They would have cost €1,000 in this country. If the Single Market is really to get in touch with the man on the street, about whom we are talking, it should be able to negotiate a Single Market price for the purchase of drugs, for example. This is a matter that is very close to the hearts of citizens in this country today. The drug Orkambi, which is for cystic fibrosis, costs €150,000 per annum per patient. I am sure that if one went to Spain or some other part of the European Union, one could purchase it much more cheaply.

When Malta assumes the Presidency, it should, if it wants to get close to the man on the street, negotiate with the massive drug companies a Single Market price that would apply right across the entire European Union, such that we would not have people going on what we now call the tablet holiday. There are people who leave Ireland and go to Spain with their prescription in their pocket. They buy their drugs for the year, have a week's holiday and return having saved money. That is unbelievable. There is not a family in Europe that does not have somebody who is dependent on drugs for some illness or other. I am sorry for bringing this up but I believe it should be mentioned when talking about the Single Market.

Chairman: It is very important. I thank Ms Mizzi for attending. I appreciate the effort she made. She came over especially to give her presentation. We appreciate that very much. The only regret members and I have is that we will not be going with Ms Mizzi as she boards the plane today given the wonderful weather in Malta and the fact it is a great place.

We will suspend for a few minutes to allow Ms Mizzi to exit and then we will go into private session.

7 December 2016

The joint committee went into private session at 2.50 p.m. and adjourned at 3 p.m. until 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 18 January 2017.