

MALTA PM BACKS EPP CALL FOR NEW MEDITERRANEAN FORUM FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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The EPP Group in the Committee of the Regions (CoR) held its extraordinary meeting in Malta on Friday 26 October with the participation of the Prime Minister of Malta, **Lawrence Gonzi**, and the President of the EPP Group in the CoR, **Isidoro Gottardo**, amongst others.

This marks the fourth occasion that the EPP Group has welcomed a head of state to its group meeting. The focus was on the role of regions and cities in the Mediterranean dialogue and proposed setting up a permanent forum for local and regional authorities within the CoR.

At both the extraordinary meeting and at a bilateral meeting with CoR First Vice-President **Luc van den Brande**, Prime Minister **Gonzi** affirmed that the EU-Mediterranean dialogue "would not be complete without dialogue between local and regional authorities" and offered support from his government for this initiative.

Furthermore, the EPP Group called for the CoR to be invited as an observer to the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA), which aims to enhance dialogue and cooperation between the countries in the Mediterranean basin.

Isidoro Gottardo, President of the EPP Group, has received a letter from the President of the European Parliament, **Hans-Gert Pöttering**, backing this request. Simon Busuttil MEP told the meeting that "*a debate at the level of the CoR on the wider Euro-Med context would be instrumental*" and that he would forward the proposal "*with full endorsement*".

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