**Daily News Summary - 13.7.2020**

**BUDGET**

**‘Beware €100m pill sweetener’**

The Sunday Times of Malta yesterday reported that according to former MEP candidate Peter Agius, a €100 million EU budget top-up could be a “pill sweetener” for the introduction of a Europe-wide financial transaction tax. Agius said he had nothing against taking up the extra allocation but called on the government to propose alternatives to Brussels, which would not have such negative impact on Malta’s economic model. Agius was reacting to fresh EU Budget proposals tabled on Friday by EU Council President Charles Michel. His comments echo those of Finance Minister Edward Scicluna when he compared the EU’s €750 billion COVID-19 economic recovery fund to a “prickly pear”.  Meanwhile Michel’s proposal on a Financial Transaction Tax means more bad news for Malta.  
  
  
[*Malta-Times:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *‘Beware €100m pill sweetener’ / ‘Beware €100m pill sweetener’ page: 7 info: by Keith Micallef date: Sunday, July 12, 2020*

**ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS**

**GDP to fall 6.9% but growth potential ‘good’**

Ratings Agency Fitch last Saturday affirmed Malta’s rating at A+ with a stable outlook, the Sunday Times of Malta and It-Torca reported. Fitch forecast that Malta’s real GDP will contract by 6.9% in 2020, “a moderate downward revision” from its April review of 5.9%. The credit ratings agency said the tourism sector had suffered a “large contraction” as a result of travel restrictions because of the pandemic. Fitch said that Malta’s medium-term potential growth remained “strong and well above the eurozone average”, at 3 to 3.5%. The ratings agency estimates that the general government balance will deteriorate to a deficit of 9.2% of GDP in 2020.  
  
  
[*L-Orizzont:*](https://www.inewsmalta.com) *"“Fiducja fl-ekonomija taghna li hi reziljenti bizzejjed”..." page: 1,5 info: by Melvin Farrugia date: Sunday, July 12, 2020*   
  
[*Malta-Times:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *GDP to fall 6.9% but growth potential ‘good’ / GDP to fall 6.9% but growth potential ‘good’ page: 7 date: Sunday, July 12, 2020*  
  
[*TVM-Malta:*](https://www.tvm.com.mt) *"Fitch affirms Malta's rating at A+, outlook 'stable' / L-aġenzija ..." info: L-ahbarijiet, 2020-07-12 05:52:00, 00:02:25, by Mario Micallef date: Sunday, July 12, 2020 5:52:00 AM CEST*

**ENERGY**

**Hydrogen may soon become the new gas for power plant**

Times of Malta reported today that according to government sources, Malta is considering switching its gas-fired power station to run on lower carbon-emitting fuels, such as hydrogen or biomethane, after the European Commission urged Malta to reconsider plans for a natural gas pipeline to Italy. The European Commission has urged Malta to reconsider the design of a proposed pipeline connecting the island to Italy because a natural gas link may not be in line with targets announced as part of Brussels’ New Green Deal. Times of Malta reported that a recently joint feasibility study conducted by two foreign engineering firms on Malta’s options for a new power station shows that if Malta’s gas power station were converted to run on hydrogen, the island would fall in line with the EU’s green targets through relatively straightforward interventions.  
  
  
[*Malta-Times:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *Hydrogen may soon become the new gas for power plant / Hydrogen may soon become the new gas for power plant page: 1,4 info: by Ivan Martin date: Monday, July 13, 2020*

**MEMBER STATES - INTERNAL AFFAIRS**

**Pressure to expel anti-Delia MPs from PN amid impasse**

Local media yesterday widely reported that Nationalist Party leader and Opposition leader Adrian Delia was facing mounting pressure from the Party’s executive committee who are meeting tomorrow to expel dissenting MPs in reaction to their decision to declare they have no confidence in the party leader. MP Chris Said, who moved the motion against Delia, insisted that the 19 MPs had no intention to split or break the party. The meeting, which was called by the PN leader himself, could have long-lasting repercussions on the party. Despite losing the support of his parliamentary group, Delia has vowed to remain at the helm and the decision now lies with the president of the Republic. Sources within the Delia camp appear to be keen on the possibility of the dissenting MPs forming a splinter party. Times of Malta reported today that President George Vella has yet to announce his decision on whether he will strip Nationalist Party leader Adrian Delia of his position as Leader of the Opposition.  MPs have expressed their frustration at the lack of a decision from the President three days after Vella held one-to-one meetings with all opposition MPs on Friday. The decision might be left to the constitutional court after the President consulted with unnamed constitutional experts over whether he can strip Delia of his position and swear in Therese Commodini Cachia as proposed Opposition Leader. Meanwhile, within the Nationalist Party, pressure is mounting from the pro-Delia camp to expel the rebel MPs who called for a change in leader.  
  
  
[*L-Orizzont:*](https://www.inewsmalta.com) *"Jinfethu l-kanuni kontra l-President / Jinfethu l-kanuni kontra l-President..." page: 1,4 date: Monday, July 13, 2020*   
  
[*Malta-Independent:*](https://www.independent.com.mt) *"Numbers on their side: ‘Rebel’ MPs believe Delia would be ..." page: 1,3 info: by Neil Camilleri date: Sunday, July 12, 2020*   
  
[*Malta-Times:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *Pressure to expel anti-Delia MPs from PN amid impasse / Pressure to expel anti-Delia MPs from PN amid impasse page: 1,3 info: by Keith Micallef date: Sunday, July 12, 2020*  
  
[*Malta-Times:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *Radio silence by president leaves PN MPs frustrated / Radio silence by president leaves PN MPs frustrated page: 1,2 info: by Matthew Xuereb date: Monday, July 13, 2020*  
  
[*Malta-Today:*](https://www.maltatoday.com.mt) *"Unfazed Delia mulls disciplinary action for rebel MPs / Unfazed ..." page: 1,3 info: by Matthew Vella date: Sunday, July 12, 2020*   
  
[*Mument:*](https://netnews.com.mt/tag/il-mument/) *"L-Ezekuttiv tal-Partit Nazzjonalista se jitlaqqa’ nhar it-Tlieta..." page: 1,3 date: Sunday, July 12, 2020*

**REGIONAL POLICY**

**€4 million investment for conservation and restoration of parishes**

The Malta Independent and L-Orizzont reported that another 10 projects of restoration and conservation on Maltese churches through European funds co-financing. The Archdiocese of Malta last Friday said that these 10 projects will also include the conservation of various works of arts and will amount to €4 million, 80% of which are co-financed through European funds. Parliamentary Secretary for European Funds Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi said that the Maltese and Gozitan churches are part of the country’s cultural patrimony and cultural heritage and help strengthen Malta’s touristic product.  
  
  
[*L-Orizzont:*](https://www.inewsmalta.com) *"Restawr f’diversi parrocci b’investiment ta’ €4 miljun minn fondi Ewropej ..." page: 5 date: Saturday, July 11, 2020*   
  
[*Malta-Independent:*](https://www.independent.com.mt) *"€4 million investment for conservation and restoration of parishes / ..." page: 4 date: Saturday, July 11, 2020*

**RULE OF LAW AND CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS**

**Article by Michelle Bachelet and Helena Dalli : Equality matters more than ever**

The Sunday Times of Malta yesterday carried a co-opinion article penned by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, and European Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, on the need for equality in a post COVID-19 world. This pandemic has laid bare the devastating impact of inequalities and we need to respond with immediate, concerted and decisive actions to end the many forms of discrimination that expose people to harm. The United Nations and the European Union will continue to work in tandem to develop responses to the coronavirus crisis that are grounded in equality and 138 UN member states and observers have called for the Spotlight Initiative which represents an unprecedented global effort to invest in gender equality.  The emergency Next Generation EU instrument is also reinforcing the EU budget by an additional €750 billion, ensuring that equality is at the heart of the recovery.  
  
  
[*Malta-Times:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *Article by Michelle Bachelet and Helena Dalli : Equality matters more than ever / Article by Michelle Bachelet and Helena Dalli : Equality matters more than ever page: 19 info: by Michelle Bachelet and Helena Dalli date: Sunday, July 12, 2020*

**SOCIAL AFFAIRS, SKILLS AND LABOUR MOBILITY**

**Population of Malta hits 500,000 for first time**

Times of Malta on Saturday, The Malta Independent today  and TVM reported on Eurostat figures which showed that Malta recorded the highest population increase in the EU in the last year in spite of it having the smallest population. Malta’s population passed the half a million for the first time ever and there was an increase of nearly 42 people for every 1,000 Malta residents between the start of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. Luxembourg, Cyprus and Ireland followed Malta for the highest increase. Overall, the EU’s population was estimated at 447.7 million at the start of this year, down by 12.8% when compared to 513.5 million in 28 member states in January of 2019. There was also a decline in births registered in Malta over the previous year. Over the past 10 years the fertility rate has decreased from 1.42 to 1.14.  
  
  
[*Malta-Independent:*](https://www.independent.com.mt) *"Malta experiences highest population increase – Eurostat / Malta experiences ..." page: 4 info: by Shona Berger date: Monday, July 13, 2020*   
  
[*Malta-Times:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *Population of Malta hits 500,000 for first time / Population of Malta hits 500,000 for first time page: 6 date: Saturday, July 11, 2020*  
  
[*TVM-Malta:*](https://www.tvm.com.mt) *"Malta registered the highest increase in population in the EU ..." info: L-ahbarijiet, 2020-07-10 05:50:00, 00:01:10, by Mario Xuereb date: Friday, July 10, 2020 5:50:00 AM CEST*

**Malta has lowest divorce rate in EU**

Times of Malta reported today that, according to figures issued by Eurostat, Malta has the lowest divorce rate in the European Union.  Malta only has 0.7 divorces per 1,000 people, putting it on a par with Ireland, which registered the same rate. Slovenia and Italy came in second and third place at a rate of 1.1 and 1.5 respectively whilst Latvia and Lithuania had the highest rates of divorce at 3.1. The average divorce rate in the EU stood at 2 per 1,000 people. According to Eurostat, marriages were also trending downward on average, with the crude marriage rate across the EU trending at 4.4 marriages per 1,000 people.  
  
  
[*Malta-Times:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *Malta has lowest divorce rate in EU / Malta has lowest divorce rate in EU page: 7 info: by Jessica Arena date: Monday, July 13, 2020*

**Article by Margaritis Schinas: Europe needs a revolution in skills. And now is the right time**

In-Nazzjon today carried an opinion article written by Vice-President of the European Commission and European Commissioner for Promoting the European Way of Life Margaritis Schinas on Europe’s need for skilled workers. The coronavirus has emphasised this need and artificial intelligence and robotics are expected to generate 60 million new jobs whilst others might change or cease to exist, making it necessary for Europe to use its talents and diversity in full. The new skills agency adopted by the European Commission aims to tackle this transition and the Commission has adopted an ambitious plan for the forthcoming five years. It is aiming to include 120 million people in training programmes every year to ensure that a minimum of 70% of the population have a basic digital education and has set out to ensure that these programmes are equally shared between both sexes and all member states and regions.  
  
  
[*In-Nazzjon:*](https://netnews.com.mt) *Article by Margaritis Schinas: Europe needs a revolution in skills. And now is the right time / Article by Margaritis Schinas: L-Ewropa tehtieg rivoluzzjoni fil-hiliet. U issa l-waqt page: 16 info: by Margaritis Schinas date: Monday, July 13, 2020*

**TRANSPORT**

**Travel ban lifted on 28 new countries**

Local media reported that the Public Health Act has been amended to allow travellers from a further 28 countries to fly to Malta International Airport as from next Wednesday. The legal notice effectively lifted the ban on travel to the United Kingdom, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, China, Vatican City, Rwanda, Uruguay, Slovenia, Japan, Morocco, Thailand, Tunisia, Portugal, Romania, Lebanon, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Jordan and Liechtenstein. These destinations will be added to the 19 countries previously approved for travel with the opening of the airport on July 1. Malta’s active COVID-19 cases are now down to five as two new recoveries have been registered and no new cases of the virus found.  
  
  
[*Malta-Independent:*](https://www.independent.com.mt) *"Coronavirus: No new cases, number of active cases drops to ..." page: 3 date: Monday, July 13, 2020*   
  
[*Malta-Times:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *"Malta to face new test on virus / Malta to ..." page: 13 info: by Herman Grech, editorial date: Monday, July 13, 2020*   
  
[*timesofmalta.com:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *28 new countries added to list of ‘safe’ travel destinations / 28 new countries added to list of ‘safe’ travel destinations info: by Jessica Arena date: Sunday, July 12, 2020*

**Malta may take legal action over EU’s ‘protectionist’ mobility rules**

It was reported by Times of Malta last Saturday that Malta is considering mounting legal action against the European Council on the new rules to reform the truck-driving industry in the Mobility Package voted in by MEPs last Wednesday. The new transport rules will have far-reaching effects for the freight industry operating on the fringes of the European Union. A spokesperson for the Transport Ministry said that the new rules were of concern to Malta as they will have negative impacts on the sector, both economically as well as regarding supply flows. The spokesperson said that the government is considering moving forward with legal action at the European Court of Justice, which could only start after the final approval of the mobility package had been approved.  
  
  
[*Malta-Times:*](https://www.timesofmalta.com) *Malta may take legal action over EU’s ‘protectionist’ mobility rules / Malta may take legal action over EU’s ‘protectionist’ mobility rules page: 7 info: by Jessica Arena date: Saturday, July 11, 2020*