

Statement by Edward Fenech Adami on the results of the referendum (Valletta, 9 March 2003)

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although the counting of the votes in the referendum has not yet ended, it is my pleasure to announce that, from the information available from estimates of vote counts that have already been completed and from vote projections, it appears very clearly that the Maltese have approved the referendum and have given a 'yes' vote for Malta to become a Member State of the European Union on 1 May next year.

I thank the Maltese for the turnout in the referendum. As we know, the turnout is about 91 % of all those who are entitled to vote. A turnout of 91 % in a referendum means that the people believe in the value of democracy, that a decision of such national importance should be made directly by the people.

There was a time when we doubted whether the Maltese would vote in full force. We are used to very high turnouts at elections, and I wish to reiterate my thanks to the Maltese people who understand the importance of this decision and have turned out in such large numbers to deliver their opinion. Of the valid votes cast, 53 % are 'yes' votes, which means that Malta will become a Member State of the European Union. And, from the projections available, it appears that about 45 % of the valid votes cast are 'no' votes.

In any democratic country, this decision will be considered a clear one, showing a well-founded determination of the Maltese people, and I must say that it is all the more so in the circumstances of this country, which we know is always split in half when it comes to political matters. Therefore, I am greatly satisfied that, after a five-week campaign, a very keen campaign, a campaign that on the 'no' side has not always been fair to our people, we have secured this positive result for Malta to become a Member State. Of course, it is our duty now to see to it that this determination is respected and implemented. As Prime Minister, I assure our people that that is precisely what I am going to do, starting from tomorrow. I shall see that this decision of such national importance — that the people understand that the best future for our country is for Malta to become a Member State — that this determination, as shown by this vote, must be implemented. Of course, I am aware that the Leader of the Opposition has already made statements giving figures and numbers. Of course, in the next few days, we shall have opportunities to talk about numbers. But the important numbers are known, and they will not change. When we say that 91 % of the people voted in this referendum, this is a high turnout, a turnout that is slightly less than we normally get at elections. At the elections — for example, let us say the 1998 elections, in which about 5 % of the population did not vote — quite normal in any democracy. I have heard that the Leader of the Opposition has based his figures on that 91 %; perhaps he has forgotten that, among those who were entitled to vote according to the most recent electoral register, there are also some deceased persons. And those people did not vote. But I should think that we shall certainly talk about the details and the less important matters in the days to come.

I wish to declare my great satisfaction with this result. And if, to date, I have had a mandate from the 1998 elections to lead Malta into Europe, I now have the direct expression of the will of the people of Malta, now that the negotiations have been finalised between my Government and the European Union. I am therefore grateful to you, deeply grateful to our people, for confirming the Government's decision.

Yes?

Q: Ivan Camilleri from Television Malta. Prime Minister, as you are aware, the Leader of the Opposition has also announced victory for his side. Aren't you worried that celebrations on both sides might cause problems ...

PM: No, I don't think that ... I worry about acts of disloyalty towards our people, as I have already said a number of times during the referendum campaign. But I think that the people are known, and I see nothing new or unexpected in what is happening.

Q: You have said that, as from tomorrow, you will see to it that the will of the people will be respected and implemented, starting from tomorrow. What did you mean by that?

PM: I am the Prime Minister. Tomorrow, I shall convene my Cabinet so that we may take the appropriate decisions.

Q: Prime Minister. ... Karl Stagno Navarra from Television News. The whole of Europe was expecting this result. You have had the courage to be the first to call a referendum in the applicant countries. What message do you wish to convey to the Maltese people that will obviously be a message relayed to the others?

PM: I believe we are the only country where the Opposition has officially made a fierce campaign against a 'yes' vote for Malta's accession to the European Union. When you consider that, despite this fierce official campaign by the Opposition, the result of the referendum in Malta has been positive, I wish the other countries — the other nine applicant countries that will also hold a referendum — a result like ours.

Q: Prime Minister.

PM: Madam?

Q: Prime Minister. Um, I wanted to ask you ... whether the result — whether it is the result that you expected.

PM: Whenever journalists asked me, I always said that I expected a result of not less than about 53 %. And I suppose that I have been almost prophetic.

Q: ... [unclear] microphone ...

Q: Yes. I'll ask the question in English if you please. I had the same question as my colleague so the second question is: when do you expect the final results, and you have said this thing about 53 % for years. How many votes have you already counted so far? This is the question. Is it less than half or more than half?

PM: It's more than half, and, of course, the projections could be made less than half an hour after the counting started. I don't know how many of you are aware of the whole process. But the process and the way that we make our forecast is to take the first 50 ballot papers from each ballot box, and the result you get from that is almost always exact to the fraction — you know — of a whole number.

Q: What does this victory mean to Malta?

PM: It means a lot to Malta. It means that Malta has taken the decision that it was supposed to take. We want to ensure a bright economic future for ourselves and for our children, stability in the future and a political system that works and that respects the rights of everyone.

Q: But can elections change this result or not?

PM: In theory, they can; in actual fact, they can't.

Q: Prime Minister, during the election campaign, you had said that not voting or spoiling one's ballot paper would mean wasting MTL 81 million. Today, you are saying that only 'no' votes count. What is your version today?

PM: My version is the same as ever. If the 'no' votes were a majority, among other things Malta would be wasting MTL 81 million. But, since the 'no' votes amounted to 45 %, and the 'yes' votes come to 53 %, it is obvious that the people have decided not to waste the MTL 81 million.

Q: Prime Minister, has there already been a show of support from the European Union, or is it too early?

PM: Um, I believe that, in writing officially, one does not count only on projections, though it cannot be ruled out that a few messages could already start coming in, but, in a few hours, we shall have the official results.