



THE MALTA CHAMBER

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **The Malta Chamber Once Again Calls for Stronger Ethical Standards in Government Appointments**

#### ***Leniency should not be the order of the day***

The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry expresses deep concern over recent revelations regarding Government appointments that disregard both merit and the ethical principles expected of public office. There is a disturbing trend of leniency and disregard for standards, which compromises the principles of meritocracy and transparency that are essential for good governance.

In December 2021, a report of the Standards Commissioner led to a Minister's resignation over a breach of ethical standards, whereby a €15,000 public contract was awarded to an unqualified personal acquaintance. This incident illustrated the necessity for strict adherence to ethical codes, particularly concerning ministerial conduct and the responsible use of public funds.

In the same period, another appointment, recently brought to light, saw the then-girlfriend, now wife, of a different Minister secure an eight-month, €68,000 p.a. role within the Ministry for Gozo—a position for which she was neither qualified nor deemed competent. This engagement was justified by the Minister as complying with the Manual of Resourcing Policies and Procedures, yet such comfort in technical adherence reveals a troubling gap in our ethical framework. The verbatim interpretation of the Ministerial Code of Ethics by the current Standards Commissioner did not consider personal relationships outside of marriage within its scope, thereby overlooking the spirit in which these guidelines were created. The spirit of ethical governance mandates transparency and prioritizes qualifications over personal affiliations, something The Malta Chamber strongly advocates for across all sectors.

The Prime Minister's acceptance of an apology as sufficient response to this matter only deepens our concerns. Being lenient on such breaches of trust is incompatible with the ethical standards expected for good governance and weakens public faith in our institutions. When standards are inconsistently enforced or diluted, public confidence in Government diminishes, and the values of meritocracy and fairness are undermined. In the private sector, high ranking officers in serious companies are held to high standards of accountability—an apology alone is not sufficient in cases of ethical misconduct. The same, if not higher, standards should apply to those entrusted with public office.

The Malta Chamber has long spoken about these principles. In 2022, a comprehensive document titled, "*A Strong Transparency, Accountability and Ethical Governance Framework for Members of Parliament*" (incl. [Link](#)) was issued. This document advocates for stricter guidelines to address issues of nepotism, favouritism, and abuse of power in Government appointments. It is our firm belief that laws and regulations should serve as ethical guidelines rather than to provide loopholes to justify

improper behaviour. Governance frameworks must be robust enough to hold public officials fully accountable and to deter abuse of power.

In every Ministry and public entity, it is crucial to ensure that appointments and public contracts are awarded based on merit, qualifications, and a genuine commitment to public service, not personal connections. This approach preserves the credibility and integrity of public institutions and ensures diligent use of taxpayer funds.

The Malta Chamber calls upon the Government to take immediate, meaningful action to reinforce the ethical standards governing ministerial conduct. We urge the Prime Minister and all public officials to treat such breaches with the seriousness they deserve, to reestablish confidence in public institutions and provide the reassurance that Government truly values transparency, meritocracy, and ethical governance.

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