

Malta's Prime Minister fields questions on rule of law and Panama Papers

Malta's Prime Minister received much criticism from MEPs during a debate on events in the country. Others argued that the plenary debate risked jumping the gun.

The main concerns raised by critical MEPs were that Prime Minister Joseph Muscat had sought to gloss over the problems during the previous administration by holding new elections and that his new administration kept on those mentioned in the Panama Papers. These MEPs also criticised Prime Minister Muscat for the Maltese authorities' lack of cooperation with the European Parliament's Money Laundering, Tax Avoidance and Tax Evasion Committee (PANA). Finally, they raised doubts regarding the rule of law in the country, saying that the police authorities were not following up on the findings of Malta's anti-money laundering agency.

Accusations and investigations must be substantiated by hard conclusions, was the main argument of other MEPs, who took the floor to argue that the plenary debate risked condemning Malta before facts had been fully established. Some argued that the European Parliament should not delve into issues which remained the prerogative of sovereign nations, whilst others asserted that the rule of law in Malta was secure beyond any doubt.

Replying at the end of the debate, Mr Muscat said that it was only right to allow the ongoing judicial investigations to conclude before judging those accused, adding that resignations would be in order in the event of prosecutions. He also said that the MEPs' criticism about Malta's structures stemmed mainly from press articles, rather than the analyses of international financial bodies. Mr Muscat also confirmed that he would attend the PANA Committee once the ongoing judicial procedures in Malta had concluded. Finally, the Prime Minister vehemently defended the rule of law, arguing that his administration had even strengthened it.

Speakers (original version)


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Contacts

John SCHRANZ

Press Officer

 (+32) 2 28 44264 (BXL)

 (+33) 3 881 74076 (STR)

 (+32) 498 98 14 02

 john.schranz@europarl.europa.eu
