

**INTERVENTION BY DR ROBERT K. VISSER, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN ASYLUM SUPPORT OFFICE, AT
THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW EASO BUILDING**

FRIDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2012

Hon. Prime Minister

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

Welcome to all of you in the new EASO house.

After a journey over 3 locations in one and a half year, EASO now finally finds stability at the beautiful Grand Harbour of Valletta. This to the very great joy of my staff and myself.

It was on 30 November 2009 that the European Union's Council of Ministers unanimously decided to place the seat of the European Asylum Support Office in Malta.

Subsequently EASO started the road to Malta.

Let me tell you a little bit about the history.

On the 1st of February last year I started in Brussels all by myself. One person, one room.

On the 19th of June last year was the day of the official inauguration of EASO. In a great and impressive ceremony at

the Upper Baraka Gardens Prime Minister Gonzi and Commissioner Malmström unveiled the EASO logo made from the famous Maltese glass. You can see this logo behind me.

On the first of August last year a small number of EASO staff moved from Brussels to the temporary premises in Marsa provided by the Government of Malta.

Now we have reached our final destination. A place where all EASO staff, already over 50, will be concentrated.

These premises are part of the Maltese bid for the seat of EASO. You can see for your self what a splendid place this is. Allow me to express my sincere thanks to the government of Malta for making these premises available to EASO.

What you see now is the result of a long and complex process. Today we are marking the culmination of a lot of work by all those involved in this project.

I sincerely thank the Maltese Government in particular the Prime Minister, and the other ministers, especially Deputy Prime Minister Borg.

I also would like to extend my special thanks to Hon. Mifsud Bonnici and Ambassador Cachia Caruana, to the European Commission, in particular Commissioner Malmstrom and DG Manservisi, and to his DG Home-team, to the European Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, to the Member States, and the Management Board of EASO, and all the members of the project team.

Without the work of all these persons and institutions we would not be celebrating this historic milestone.

I would also like to commend the good cooperation we have had with the Maltese authorities, in particular the Ministry of Home and Parliamentary affairs. I believe that we have set new benchmarks in this regard.

EASO was established with the aim of enhancing practical cooperation on asylum matters and helping Member States fulfil their European and international obligations to give protection to people in need. It also provides support to Member States whose asylum and reception systems are under particular pressure.

EASO has only been operational for a more than a year. However, it already plays an important role in the establishment of a Common European Asylum System. Let me just mention a few examples.

During the past year:

- EASO provided **emergency support** to Greece and Luxembourg which have both faced particular pressure on their asylum system;
- EASO started building an **Early Warning and Preparedness System** with the aim of detecting situations likely to give rise to particular asylum pressures.
- EASO **provides training and developed training material** in support of the enhancement of quality and harmonisation in the area of asylum. Enhancing practical cooperation, disseminating best practice, providing technical support to help Member States implement EU asylum; already an important number of trainings have been given this year.
- EASO published a **Country of Origin Information report** on Afghanistan and a Common Country of Origin

Methodology report. This sort of information is essential for asylum officials during the asylum determination process.

- We have established a **Consultative Forum** to exchange information and pool knowledge between EASO and civil society organisations.

We have also started to build our own institutional experience in the area of relocation, and we have recently worked, in full coordination with the European Commission, on the evaluation of the Pilot Project for intra-EU Relocation from Malta (EUREMA).

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Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

Malta, as a host country, is very important for EASO and EASO is here to stay.

This is the reasons why EASO has made a considerable investment in this building.

However, EASO is also important for Malta. Besides the infrastructural and physical investment made by the agency in Malta, I am proud to say that in this year alone, many hundreds of officials, as well as representatives of civil society, the academic world and NGO's have visited Malta for meetings or attended courses organised by EASO.

EASO can now boast of a state-of-the-art building in Valletta's Grand Harbour,

which provides the agency with: good working conditions for its staff; modern and future oriented equipment and facilities; and will ensure that EASO activities (such as conferences, training, meetings, etc) are hosted under the same roof.

The Maltese government has promised that the remaining part of the building will be ready by the end of this year.

I am confident that these premises will provide EASO with all the necessary elements to successfully fulfil its mission, and grow further in the near future.

Following this explanation you will be able to understand why this EASO house already feels like our EASO Home.

Thank you all for being here and sharing this special moment with me and my dedicated staff.

I would now like to invite the Prime Minister to take the floor.