



19th January 2010

STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE MEDIA RELEASE...

Malta's Right to a Spring-hunting Derogation

We refer to the international campaign launched by BirdLife International against the illegal killing of protected birds and against spring hunting.

We reiterate our condemnation of illegal killing of protected birds and reaffirm our resolve for zero tolerance in that respect. Our commitment is publicly known. It is evidenced by our total co-operation with the forces of law and order, and by our recent call for the appointment of marshals to supervise the various hunting zones of the Maltese islands during the spring season. Therefore, as regards the illegal killing of protected birds, nobody should be in any doubt that we stand four-square with the law enforcers.

Concerning the European Court of Justice (ECJ) Case, however, it is very clear that BirdLife are purposely trying to confuse the spring-hunting issue to give the Maltese public, and indeed the international public, the wrong impression. As is well known, the EU Commission had brought the case against Malta because it believed that autumn provided an alternative satisfactory solution to spring hunting. The ECJ ruled against Malta for the years 2004 – 2007 for allowing spring hunting to take place in those years through a derogation that was incorrectly applied. It must be emphasized that the illegal shooting of protected bird species was **never**, and **at no point**, part of the ECJ case.

The ECJ's verdict vindicated the hunters' argument that, in the particular case of Malta autumn hunting is by far not a satisfactory solution alternative to spring hunting in respect of the two hunted species, namely, quails and turtle-doves. The ECJ decision was extremely clear on that crucial point. Therefore, without any ifs and buts, the ECJ decision definitely paves the way for the Maltese government to open spring hunting, albeit within the parameters of the Birds Directive, which the court alluded to in its verdict.

The two Maltese government media releases, dated 31st January 2008 and 9th September 2009 respectively, expressed the government's belief that the ECJ in Luxembourg was the best place where this issue should be settled once and for all, and that the government would abide by its verdict. Following the ECJ's landmark decision, the Maltese government now has an ethical obligation and a moral duty **a fortiori** to open a limited and strictly supervised spring-hunting season this year. The outcome is definitive, and nobody – absolutely nobody – can appeal the judgement. Misguidedly influenced by their discredited local foreign-led partners, BirdLife International's campaign against spring hunting, therefore, is nothing but an affront to the highest institution of the European Union.

In conclusion, we deplore this arrogant attempt by BirdLife Malta and their parent organization to intimidate the Maltese Prime Minister. We trust that Dr Gonzi will rise to the occasion and resist this unjust pressure from an organization that plainly considers itself to be above the law. This time, the Maltese government has the backing of the European Court of Justice, as well as the total support of the hunting organizations and all the law-abiding hunters and their families. In the interest of justice and transparency, there is no doubt that Dr Gonzi will do the right thing for his people, especially the hunters, whose status as equal citizens within the EU is now restored and endorsed by none other than Europe's top legislative body.

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