

# An enduring relationship

By HE JOSEPH ZAMMIT TABONA

HIGH COMMISSIONER OF MALTA TO THE UNITED KINGDOM



JOSEPH TABONA

was born in 1944 and educated at St Edwards College, Malta. He was articled with Turquand Youngs & Co. in London and qualified as a Chartered Accountant in 1971. He became a partner of PricewaterhouseCoopers until his retirement from active practice in March, 2000. In 2009, he was appointed by the Government of Malta as High Commissioner to the Court of St James's. He has served as Chairman of the Malta Stock Exchange, FinanceMalta, Viset Malta plc, Malta Development Corporation, the Malta External Trade Corporation, the Institute for the Promotion of Small Enterprise, and Executive Director of the Malta Enterprise Board.

Towards late November 2008, I was informed that the Cabinet of Ministers approved my nomination to serve as High Commissioner of Malta to the United Kingdom – a veritable top diplomatic post indeed. Needless to say, I accepted without hesitation, requesting, in so doing, permission to consult my wife Susan and my children, before formally accepting this exciting assignment. Typical of governments, I was given 24 hours to do so. I took up my post in April 2009 and presented my Letter of Credence to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 10 June 2009.

Malta and the UK enjoy excellent relations, both in the political and economic spheres. Numbers also demonstrate this special relationship. The UK represents over 31 per cent of incoming tourists to Malta; the stock of FDI in Malta from the UK stands at over €460 million, the visible trade deficit has over the past years decreased considerably, exports of services to the UK increased from €569 million in 2006 to €903 million in 2011 and we have a favourable services balance of €449 million.

Once I took office I set out to further enhance bilateral ties. From the start, I decided that what was most needed was to increase Malta's profile in the UK, so I went about this by having supplements/articles featuring Malta in various UK daily papers and magazines as well as "networking" within the financial and other sectors that could effect our economy back home. Because of my professional background relating to the financial sector, and having held various chairmanships of government entities as well as the private sector, I feel confident nowadays to contribute useful insights relating to this sphere of activity, lifted directly from personal experience.

Within two weeks of arriving in London, I was introduced to two directors of the largest airline in the UK (by numbers of passengers carried). Within weeks I took them down to Malta on a familiarisation visit and they were really impressed with what the island could offer. Just six months later, this visit culminated in one of the world's leading aircraft total solutions providers announcing that they were going to set up an aviation maintenance company in Malta employing some 150 people, and the UK airline signed a US\$1.6 billion contract with them to service all of their planes in Malta over the next eleven years.

With regards to Malta's profile, in April 2010 and

one year later in April 2011, *The Banker* magazine had written articles on the opportunities that Malta was offering in the financial service sector. Moreover *Hedge Funds Review*, had three dedicated publications written on Malta between 2009 and 2011. In June 2010 and again in July 2011, an eight page supplement appeared on Malta in *The Daily Telegraph*, the biggest selling quality newspaper in the UK. *The Guardian* also had a supplement on Malta in September 2011.

Malta was extensively showcased at the exhibition held at Harrods, one of the world's most renowned department stores, for the whole of March 2012. The campaign consisted of an impressive display, in the 18 front windows of Harrods, of national artefacts provided by Heritage Malta, including a sunken galleon displaying Mdina Glass and Maltese antiques, fine art and silver. A number of Malta flags embellished the façade. The store's display windows and screens are all variously themed, promoting diverse aspects of the Maltese islands, especially with regards to history and culture, tourism, business and industry, as well as financial services.

I must take this opportunity of thanking the Prime Minister and various Cabinet Ministers and Government agencies as well as the private sector, without whose support I certainly would not have been able to carry out any of these initiatives. I am pleased that the dedicated publication on Malta by *FIRST Magazine* is an important initiative in raising the profile of our beautiful and effective small island.

Throughout my term in office in London I spent most of my time networking and as a result a great many people have relocated various activities to Malta. I did come across many Maltese who worked in the financial, hospitality and other sectors, and this encouraged me to set up the Malta Business Network in December 2011. I host a reception at the Malta High Commission every last Tuesday of the month for our members and guests. In addition I also organise a monthly breakfast or luncheon seminar, when various distinguished guest speakers delivering talks about various topics on Malta. I would suggest that anyone interested to learn more about us and our activities should look at our website [www.maltabusinessnetwork.com](http://www.maltabusinessnetwork.com).

It certainly has been a great privilege for my wife Susan and myself to serve our country here in London. We have been fortunate enough in meeting many distinguished people, some of whom have become our friends. E