

PINK Diplomacy

Embracing diversity and equality in foreign policy

by Ambassador Keith Azzopardi

Malta is regarded as one of the most progressive countries and a vocal defender of LGBTIQ rights, having secured a top spot on the ILGA rainbow index over the past years. Its strong conviction on equal rights to all, including those based on sexual orientation and gender identity, was further attested in the unanimous approval by the Parliament of Malta to amend the Constitution in this regard¹.

The ambitious LGBTIQ Equality Strategy and Action plan 2018-2022² underscores Malta's resolute commitment to mainstream the legislative framework enacted on LGBTIQ rights in our society's daily life and service provisions.

While more needs to be done, Malta remains a role model to the rest of the world in the fight for equality and inclusion. Despite the lack of similar progress on LGBTIQ rights in many other parts of the world for reasons pertaining to the political, cultural or religious beliefs of those respective societies, Malta should continue to rise to the challenge of advocating human rights both in multilateral forums as well as through its strong bilateral ties. In return, Pink diplomacy could further designate Malta as a logical hub for the social, economic and cultural activities of the LGBTIQ communities worldwide.

Pink Global

Malta's resolute commitment to promote equal rights for the LGBTIQ community was exemplified in Malta's drive to push for the implementation of the European Commission's 'List of Actions to Advance LGBT equality'³ during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2017.

Nonetheless, support for LGBTIQ rights remain subject to debate at global level. While international and regional organizations recognize the absence of LGBTIQ equal rights, we have witnessed limited progress during the past decade. As a matter of fact, no such reference was made in the final version of the

Sustainable Development Goals⁴. Hence diplomacy remains more relevant than ever. "For LGBT rights to become a worldwide reality, countries must honour their human rights commitments domestically while advocating for change on the international stage."⁵

Pink Economy

The "Pink economy" is valued to be around \$300 billion per annum, while the LGBT community's purchasing power is estimated to be \$3 trillion.⁶ With a sound ecosystem for its diversified economic sectors, and its reputation as an LGBTIQ friendly destination, Malta could be a natural hub for the LGBTIQ business community.

¹ "Act No. X of 2014 - Constitution of Malta (Amendment) Act", [Online] Parliament of Malta - Constitution of Malta (Amendment) Act (parlament.mt) [2021, April]

² "LGBTIQ Equality Strategy & Action Plan 2018-2020", [Online] LGBTIQActionPlan_20182022.pdf (gov.mt) [2021, April]

³ "High Level Ministerial Conference on LGBTIQ Equality Mainstreaming", (22-23 February 2017), [Online] (eu2017.mt) [2021, April]

⁴ United Nations, (2015). "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development" [Online] (un.org) [2021, April]

⁵ Violet Lhant, (2019) LGBT Rights on the International Stage: An Analysis of Diplomatic Practice, LGBTQ Policy Journal, Harvard Kennedy School student publication, [Online] (hkspublications.org) [2021, April]

⁶ Wolny, Nick, (10 June 2019) "The LGBTQ+ Community Has \$3.7 Trillion In Purchasing Power; Here's How We Want You To Sell to Us" [Online] entrepreneur.com) [2021, April]

Economic development and LGBTIQ inclusion are interlinked⁷. Malta's evolving legislative framework combatting LGBTIQ discrimination, coupled by broad ranging economic incentives could make the country an especially attractive destination for LGBTIQ businesses. Additional measures could include the certification⁸ and incentives for LGBTIQ businesses, use of blockchain technology⁹ and the possibility of a business incubator for pink businesses.

Likewise, LGBTIQ tourism continues to have increased influence on the global economy¹⁰. Already considered as a friendly LGBTIQ destination, Malta has the potential of becoming a strategic competitor to existing renowned LGBTIQ destinations, in a sector which contributes to around 5%¹¹ of the global gross domestic product.

Pink Culture

In Greg Day's words, "Art practice has been a driving force in building our [LGBT] community and movement. The arts have provided inspiration and refuge to those facing the adversity of discrimination and disasters."¹² Indeed, 'cultural soft power'¹³ becomes more relevant than ever before in fostering not just the promotion of one nation's identity, but also to serve as an igniting force of change towards empowering minorities and advocating sustainable development.

Malta's rich cultural heritage and its advances in new technologies offer the LGBTIQ community worldwide the opportunity to forge dynamic partnerships with local artists and institutions in an environment of affirmation and respect. New and emerging technologies have changed the concept of how contemporary art and the art market are shared in our interconnected world, thus creating new opportunities for the LGBTIQ community.

Conclusion

Mainstreaming the advocacy of LGBTIQ inclusion and equality into diplomacy should be a fundamental objective of every nation, big or small, in pursuit of safeguarding our democratic principles. Embracing this approach, offers overarching benefits both for the well-being of the LGBTIQ community worldwide and to the respective countries. While Malta already enjoys an excellent reputation within the LGBTIQ community, its continuing progress in promoting the human rights of the LGBTIQ community should be simultaneously synced with the promotion of similar economic opportunities. This synergy of policies promoted both by local entities, including the LGBTIQ representations, and echoed by the country's representatives around the globe could further put Malta on the map as a logical hub for the LGBTIQ international community based on the principles of respect, diversity and opportunities.

⁷ Badgett Lee M.V., Nezhad Sheila, Waaldijk, van der Meulen Rodgers Yana, (November 2014) *The Relationship between LGBT Inclusion and Economic Development: An Analysis of Emerging Economies*, USAID, The Williams Institute. [Online] (usaid.gov) [2021, April]

⁸ US National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, "Get Certified in 4 easy steps!" [Online] (nglcc.org) [2021, April]

⁹ LGBT TOKEN, (14 April, 2018) "Using Blockchain Technology to Advance Equal Rights and Advance Acceptance For The LGBT Community", White Paper Version 0.8.1 [Online] (lgbt-token.org) [2021, April]

¹⁰ United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), (2012) "Global Report on LGBT Tourism: AM Reports – Volume three." [Online] (amazonaws.com) [2021, April]

¹¹ UNWTO's estimates are based on fragmented information which is collected from countries which have data available on LGBT tourism's contribution to GDP.

¹² Public Diplomacy Magazine (2015) "IN FOCUS California LGBT Arts Alliance: An interview with Greg Day", University of Southern California, [Online] (researchgate.net) [2021, April]

¹³ UNESCO, "The Soft Power of Culture" [Online] (unesco.org) [2021, April]



KEITH AZZOPARDI

Keith Azzopardi has been appointed as Ambassador of Malta to the USA in September 2018 and as non-resident High Commissioner to the Commonwealth of The Bahamas and Canada, based in Washington DC. Prior to his current appointment, he served as Malta's Ambassador to Austria and as Permanent representative to the International Organisations in Vienna between September 2013 and August 2018.

During his term in Austria, Ambassador Azzopardi was accredited to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), during which he chaired the Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) between January and April 2014 as well as a number of FSC-Permanent Council meetings during the same period. He also served at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO), the UN International Development Organisation (UNIDO), the UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), Wassenaar Arrangement and others. From January to June 2017, Ambassador Azzopardi served as the Representative of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union in Austria.

Prior to his diplomatic career, Ambassador Azzopardi worked for a number of years as an Administrator and political advisor for the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. During his time in Brussels, he worked in the Enlargement and Eastern Partnership Unit, being mainly responsible for relations with Ukraine and Moldova, in the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee and the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Committee, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, the NATO-EU Parliamentary Assembly, the Inter-parliamentary Conference on CFSP and CSDP as well as the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Sub-Committee on Security and Defence,

Ambassador Azzopardi held different position in a number of youth organisations both in Malta and abroad. In 2014, he was appointed as an Honorary President of the Malta-Austrian Friendship Association and as Honorary Member of the Union League of Philadelphia in 2019.

Ambassador Azzopardi holds a Bachelor (Hons) degree in International Relations from the University of Malta and a Masters Degree in Diplomatic Studies from the Mediterranean Academy for Diplomatic Studies. He is married to Daoruang Pimpila and has a daughter.