



Roberto Viola, Director General DG Connect.



MCA CEO Jesmond Bugeja

# 'Unlocking Digital Value for Society'

## A conference to celebrate 20 years of the Malta Communications Authority

The Malta Communications Authority (MCA) this year celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary – reaching such a milestone deserves reflection on the past, a celebration of the present and preparation towards the future. To commemorate this anniversary, a hybrid day conference was held on November 25, with the purpose to initiate discussions on the vision for the MCA going forward with the engagement from both local and international experts.

### Historical context

Some three decades ago innovation and progress in telecommunications technology began attracting private investment, leading to the end of an era for typically government controlled communications services. Globally, National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) began to be established as independent regulators to cultivate a fair and competitive communications market for the benefit of citizens.

In January 2001 and in preparation for the evolution from a monopolized telecommunications sector into a fully liberalized one, the Malta Communications Authority was set up as the statutory body responsible for the regulation of the electronic communications sector – including fixed and mobile telephony, Internet and TV distribution services – as well as the postal services, and more recently the eCommerce sector.

Full liberalization of the telecommunications market came in 2003 and from then till now, Malta has met and even surpassed many other European countries in services being offered to consumers. Over the past 20 years, the MCA has built a solid reputation as a fair and expert independent communications regulator. This trust in the Authority's work is considered an instrumental factor in attracting foreign investment in Malta's technology sec-

tor, and more particularly, the telecommunications sector from all corners of the world, including the UAE, the US and the UK, resulting in the thriving competitive market we see today.

### A vision towards the future

MCA's CEO Jesmond Bugeja opened the conference with a strong message towards the future stating that: "20 years full of challenges transformed into opportunities have nurtured investment and placed Malta as one of the leaders in connectivity in Europe. A journey marked by so many developments and accomplishments for the sector, the country, and the MCA and which promises to become even more exciting with the advent of transformative technologies such as 5G that are poised to unlock a new world of connected opportunity."

A video message from the Chair of the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) praised the active role Malta plays in BEREC saying that the MCA may be considered as a small regulator but, "the MCA is definitely punching above its weight in terms of influence within BEREC."

He thanked MCA CEO for his work as Vice-Chair during 2021 and added this was significant in marking the first time the MCA formed part of BEREC's esteemed leadership team.

The morning panel discussions centered on the decade ahead, evaluating both digital opportunities and challenges. On the opportunities front, the panels explored what actions are to be taken to encourage investment in technological innovation and deliver real value to citizens. Direct reference was made to Europe's plan to achieve the digital transformation of society and economy by 2030, through best practice cooperation initiatives centered on 5G and connectivity initiatives across Europe.

With regards to challenges, the panels agreed that protecting both the economy and society is of top priority for the EU, and initiatives such as the Digital Services Act – planned for adoption in 2022 – and aimed at safeguarding society against online harms, will seek to address a number of concerns to create a safer digital space for all EU citizens, while fostering innovation, growth, and competitiveness within a harmonised single market. This is a particularly relevant topic for the MCA as it takes on new responsibilities such as its recent designation as Digital Services Coordinator for the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), advancing MCA's journey in the field of digital regulation.

In commemoration of 20 years of operations the MCA produced a set of postage stamps which were presented to the CEO Bugeja, by MaltaPost CEO Joseph Gafa. An announcement will be published on the MCA website with details for those interested in acquiring a set of the unique numbered folder and postal stamps.

### Present opportunities and challenges

The conference resumed with an afternoon session focused on contemporary issues related to digital services, as regulated by the MCA. A presentation was delivered on MCA's strategic vision for local eCommerce in the upcoming years, addressing the most pertinent questions identified through survey results and trends.

This was followed by a panel discussion made up of speakers from different business environments on adding value for society through digital services, further examining the present opportunities and challenges being dealt with in everyday scenarios. The panel agreed that we are witnessing a

shift in consumer expectations, increasing complexity in systems and above all, with the application of new regulations, it is more important than ever that the MCA as regulator keeps listening and communicating in order to continue to support business organisations towards digitalisation.

The final panel of the day was preceded by a detailed presentation on the technical aspects of developing websites to meet the requirements of the Web Accessibility Directive, which the MCA also implements and enforces locally. The panel was made up of contributors from relevant establishments, bodies and entities and moderated by Dr Marica Gatt from the San Miguel Primary Resource Centre. The discussion centered around the current needs of people with disability and addressed how COVID-19 has affected these people especially in the digital realm.

### Concluding message

Roberto Viola, the Director General of DG Connect at the European Commission, joined the conference through live video link to deliver the day's closing message. He thanked the MCA on behalf of the European Commission for the great work it did in the past 20 years, adding that the MCA: "Should be proud that Malta has in the recent years, moved into the sixth place in Europe in terms of performance of digitalization."

The full day proceedings were translated into sign language by Agenzija Sapport and the recording is available on video, which can be found on the MCA's YouTube channel.

