

Friday, April 10, 2015, 00:01 by Claudia Calleja

'Gonzi got it right on interconnector'

Prime Minister praises predecessor for his vision on energy



Former Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi (left) with Prime Minister Joseph Muscat and his Italian counterpart Matteo Renzi. Photo: Darrin Zammit Lupi

Prime Minister Joseph Muscat yesterday thanked his predecessor, Lawrence Gonzi, for having the vision to start and commit to the "ambitious" Malta-Sicily interconnector project.

"He had a choice to make. He made the right call. Credit goes to him," Dr Muscat said, adding that he was sure Dr Gonzi faced opposition when he decided to take on the project that would link Malta to the European electricity grid.

Dr Muscat was speaking during the inaugural ceremony of the interconnector, attended by Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and covered by international media.

He thanked many people apart from Dr Gonzi – who was sitting in the second row together with a number of ministers.

Among those he thanked were Mr Renzi and his predecessor Enrico Letta, for helping overcome bureaucracy.

Dr Muscat went on to say that the interconnector was an important addition to Malta's energy mix and the plan was to embark on more interconnector projects.

Preliminary studies for a gas pipeline from Italy were at an advanced stage and, once the situation in North Africa stabilised, the government would seek such projects with its southern neighbours.

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He added that the Mediterranean was often overlooked by Europe when it could be "changed from a sea of tragedy to one of opportunity".

His message was echoed by Mr Renzi who said that such collaborative projects helped send a message to Europe that the Mediterranean was a "mare nostrum [our sea] for everybody".

As the world was going through a "time of wars", he preferred to invest in "bridges and interconnection".

"I believe the most important thing is the value of cultural and economic relations between the two sides who are investing in interconnection and not in war," he said, referring to the Italy-Malta collaboration.

Energy Minister Konrad Mizzi said this project only marked the beginning of a journey of further collaboration between the two countries. Malta had a future in interconnection, he said, and the EU should continue to diversify its energy supply.

In 2010 the Nationalist government announced that French company Nexans would be laying down the underwater cable.

The permit was issued in 2013 and laying started that December.

This January Enemalta and Enel Trade, the electricity and gas trading arm of multinational power company Enel, signed a five-year framework agreement to use the Malta-Sicily interconnector for the importation of electricity from Italy.

Soon afterwards, Enemalta started importing electricity through the €200 million interconnector that comprises a 120km high voltage system capable of bidirectional flow of electrical power, transferring 200 MW of electricity.

In Sicily, the interconnector is linked to the Italian network at 230kV at the Terna substation in Ragusa while the network in Malta lands at Qalet Marku in Bahar ic-Cagħaq.

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