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Lying to the young is wrong

We must make sure our youngsters are made aware that there are challenges they will have to face in their transition to adult life



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The National Youth Policy is a priority for my ministry and for my government, but it is also a priority for all those committed to helping and supporting young people. The policy must be an inclusive one with democratic participation by youths themselves and in which the strategic objectives need to be clear and achievable.

There are several stiff challenges we have to face. We need a change in mentality and to promote a more enterprising spirit. Not everyone agrees with me that our youths are generally over-protected and lack a sense of adventure when compared to their European peers. I believe that Malta's inclusion model that we have developed over the past 12 years is one that

encourages dependency, rather than the harnessing of individual skills and independent living and self-reliance in the context of solidarity.

We still have a substantial number of youths in the 18-25 age group who are seemingly idle. Out of the 4,000 students who completed compulsory education at the end of the 2013/14 scholastic year, around 23% are not working, training, or pursuing further education. In 2013, the total of those we refer to as NEETs, aged between 18 and 24, was around 7,000.

Malta's gender gap with regard to educational outcomes at school is one of the highest in the world, with the average exam results of girls some 20% higher than those of their male counterparts. We need to discover the reason behind why Maltese boys are under-achieving at school and take more steps to address this problem.

Nowadays, children develop earlier and faster. Social media has opened access to a virtual world well

outside immediate families and communities. The period of transition from childhood to adulthood is becoming faster and more complex. We need to create more and equal opportunities for young people in education, in society and in the labour market. We will adopt definite initiatives specifically targeted at the development of young people in areas such as non-formal learning, youth work, mobility, active citizenship and social inclusion. These measures will help facilitate the transition from education to work.

We want our youngsters to widen their borders as only a small number of Maltese students go on exchange programmes such as Erasmus+. The local industry, especially those companies involved in science and technology, often find it difficult to enrol Maltese young employees in specialised training overseas.

The National Youth Policy is a vision for the future of our youths. Young people should be respected, valued and listened to. They need to be supported and encouraged in building personal and social relationships and in developing their abilities and talents. Youth work is one of the main drivers of an effective youth policy. It can be described as a planned learning programme and it should be based on voluntary participation.

Young people must be given the necessary support to fulfill their potential and aspirations to be themselves. We need to strengthen island communities to ensure that the necessary support infrastructure is in place for young people to have places to meet, socialise and develop their skills and competences.

There needs to be a focus on action. The Policy Advisory Group has listed a number of action plans that will turn this policy document into a plan of action. It is a bold plan and prepared in consultation with all relevant ministries, entities, the National Youth Council and other stakeholders in the youth field.

It is by no means an easy task and we require the direct participation of our youths. We must make sure that our youngsters feel part of this policy and they must be made aware that there are challenges that they will have to face in their transition to adult life.

We must not mislead them by pretending that this is a smooth transition and I quote the poem 'Lies' by Yevgeny Yevtushenko to highlight the difficulties that our youths face: "Lying to the young is wrong. Proving to them that lies are true is wrong. Telling them that God's in his heaven and all's well with the world is wrong. They know what you mean. They are people too. Tell them the difficulties can't be counted, and let them see not only what will be but see with clarity these present times. Say obstacles exist they must encounter, sorrow comes, hardship happens. The hell with it. Who never knew the price of happiness will not be happy. Forgive no error you recognize, it will repeat itself, a hundredfold and afterward our pupils will not forgive in us what we forgave."

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