

## **A Graceful Exit**

The political career of Eddie Fenech Adami has been marked by a string of successes and records. He is the longest serving Prime Minister since Independence. Since the birth of the Nationalist Party in 1880, no Nationalist leader has served at the helm of the party for so long. Eddie Fenech Adami is also a clear 'winner' in gaining popular support for himself and for the Party. He won five out of the last 6 general elections, and was victorious in the European Union referendum.

It was only in 1981 with Eddie Fenech Adami at the top post, that the Nationalist Party won an absolute majority of votes cast for the first time in its history. No wonder the Party has repeatedly confirmed him in the office of leader for six consecutive times. Few Party Leaders had the opportunity to gracefully withdraw from office in style as Eddie did last Saturday; a victorious Prime Minister choosing the right moment and shaping events rather than letting events dominate his decision to bow out.

Saturday was full to the brim with emotional moments. I happened to be in the Secretary General's Office when Eddie signed the letter addressed to the President of the General Council, inviting him to start the process for the election of a new leader. It was a touching moment, after a life long dedication to the Party which he galvanized in virtue of his political vision, organization skills and sheer internal strength. A copy of the letter was distributed to us as a memento of the occasion during the Parliamentary Group meeting.

In my view, Eddie Fenech Adami's greatest moment was in 1986 when in spite of all the violent incidents against a party robbed of a deserved victory in 1981, and following the cold-blooded murder of Raymond Caruana at Gudja, he remained unreservedly faithful to the Christian traditions of the Party. He did not utter one single word which could be even remotely interpreted as an incitement to unlawfulness or revenge. He persevered and won.

Even his political opponents in their heart of hearts know that Fenech Adami has secured a place in the annals of Maltese history. The cross party support he received in

the referendum and electoral campaign was ample proof of the wide support he enjoys by the mainstream of Maltese society.

His successor shall undoubtedly have a difficult task in occupying the office of leader after him, but the baton has now been passed to a new generation. It has so passed not in the throes of defeat but in the trail of victory.

The Prime Minister's appeal to the Party to be 'popular' and not sectarian in direction and outlook in true Christian democratic fashion is wise advice indeed. His legacy is a living one, and the succession process just opened will be conducted in the highest tradition of the party; as happened in 1977. The contest shall be one amongst friends. The new leader, as happened in 1977, will enjoy the support of all, thus ensuring and safeguarding the party's secret but greatest asset: party unity.