

Minister has no idea where Sai Mizzi is operating from

Foreign Minister **GEORGE VELLA** tells **Ivan Camilleri** he cannot understand 'the hullabaloo' behind the appointment of the Energy Minister's wife, Sai Mizzi-Liang, as Malta's trade envoy to Asia and Malta's first consul general in Shanghai.

Can you confirm that the Foreign Ministry appointed Sai Mizzi-Liang as Malta's consul general in Shanghai?

Yes. She was nominated last September and was approved by the Chinese in November. When we were thinking of appointing a consul general in Shanghai we had to nominate someone who was already there, on the ground.

We thought the best way to do this was to use the person we already had there, so we nominated Sai Mizzi-Liang. She will remain there until we decide otherwise.

What is her remuneration as consul general?

Nothing. She is not receiving a penny from our ministry. Not a single euro over and above the package she already has. She is not on our ministry's payroll.

What are her contact details and where she is working from?

Her office is located on the 11th floor, Unit 7, Magnolia Plaza, Xuehuaxiu District, Shanghai. She was instrumental in helping us find the right place but she did not make the final decision.

The decision was taken by the ministry and not by Ms Mizzi-Liang. This is an office and not a residence.

Is this the first time Malta has a consul in Shanghai?

Yes. Ms Mizzi-Liang will also have jurisdiction over other Chinese provinces.

Did you buy the premises or will the government be renting it?

The place was bought for 13.3 million Chinese yuan [€1.9 million]. The EU will partially fund the place and we have to ensure the new office issues enough visas to justify the funding.

So, until now, Ms Mizzi-Liang has not even started working from the new office? Who is paying for her accommodation in Shanghai?

I really don't know and don't ask me. What I can tell you is that it surely is not my ministry. There may be an arrangement with Malta Enterprise but I do not have a clue.

What is the average amount of visas issued in Shanghai so far per month?

None, because the consulate is still not up and running. It is still an empty building. The property was only bought last March and refurbishment works are still ongoing.

So where has Ms Mizzi-Liang been working from for the past two years?

She has been doing work for Malta Enterprise and I do not know where she works from [in Shanghai]. The embassy is still doing consular work from Beijing and will keep doing this until the place in Shanghai is ready. Ms Mizzi-Liang was never in Beijing, she was always in Shanghai.

I cannot understand. So is she working from home? Where is she working from?

I don't know where she is working from. As I did not appoint her, I do not have a clue what she was doing [for Malta Enterprise].



The Foreign Minister confirmed that Sai Mizzi-Liang was nominated last September as Malta's consul-general in Shanghai.

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So when will the consulate in Shanghai open?

The target is the end July or beginning of August.

In the meantime, did Ms Mizzi-Liang do any consular work for you?

Yes, of course. She is working from Shanghai.

Yet you do not know where she is working from?

Sincerely, I don't know. Malta Enterprise may be in a better position to tell you. I think her office [for Malta Enterprise] will eventually be located in the new consulate.

So Ms Mizzi-Liang never worked on consular matters from the embassy in Beijing?

She was never physically working from our embassy in Beijing. But, obviously, she

was working in conjunction with them. I really cannot understand why there is all this hullabaloo surrounding Sai Mizzi-Liang. There were European commissioners who had their wives working in the highest echelons of the Commission. What's wrong with this?

She is capable, she is Chinese, can handle certain things well and has contacts from her past. And, the government, not me, believed her services should be used in Malta's interests.

I don't have anything to do with her. She was only put on our [ministry's] books because we had to appoint a consul in Shanghai. However, I think we cannot criticise her simply because she is married to a minister. We need to judge her on her capabilities and her performance.

Yes but till now we do not know anything about what she is doing and from where. The government's secrecy surrounding her appointments is not helping much.

You know we cannot say what she does and who she speaks to. This is the same about other consuls. Contacts are contacts. Results cannot be really measured in this area. Things take a lot of time to mature.

I am not in a position to say what she has achieved so far. Maybe the Prime Minister or Malta Enterprise, and whoever appointed her, can tell you. On my part, from the assessment I have so far, she has contributed to some things.

Such as?

I cannot tell you because it is very difficult to discuss ongoing negotiations.

Many have remarked that the decision to open an office in Shanghai was

specifically designed to cater for the Energy Minister's wife personal needs?

Who says this is a pea-brain.

So there is no truth in this?

It is categorically untrue. We were almost crying out to open a consulate in Shanghai. Even the previous government had been trying.

So you are telling me that the government appointed Sai Mizzi-Liang because she happened to be there at the right time?

We needed somebody and she was there already. It was convenient for us.

Who suggested she should be consul?

I don't really know. It certainly was not me. I was told there was this person we could appoint. I had no objection and we simply put her name forward. Through her, we wanted to show the Chinese we meant business as she was already established. The Chinese are sometimes very touchy in certain things.

If you, personally, had to make the choice again, would you appoint a minister's wife to this job?

This is a hypothetical question. I am not going to answer for others. If that occasion arises again, I will decide depending on the prevailing circumstances. What I can personally tell you is one thing. Until today, I do not think that one can regret her appointment judging by her performance.

I do not want to speak about her salary and conditions as I had nothing to do with it. I am not interested in that. I [the ministry] have my own rules, which I follow according to established norms. I just want to say that if she has to be censured under my watch I will have no problem doing so.