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## Metsola's moment

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Roberta Metsola's impressive election to the post of President of the European Parliament was no surprise to those who know how effective she is in her political career.

Both as a colleague and as a sociologist, I witnessed how Roberta works and can only say that she epitomizes the professional politician. She is knowledgeable, articulate, media-savvy, and above all, a highly effective campaigner and negotiator, both on the ground and at higher levels. Metsola is open s there when it matters.



In this short article I do not intend to repeat what has already been written about Metsola in the extensive press coverage, at Maltese, European and global levels, given to her in these past days. What I will do is propose some interpretations of what Metsola stands for and what she faces in her prestigious role.

To begin with, she has made it clear that she will do her best to “represent the house with dignity” in taking up positions which are democratically approved. Her stance on abortion has been highlighted by various media houses and political adversaries, but there are many other issues which Metsola will be facing, and which may stir controversy at European, national, and party levels. Issues such as climate change, migration, and corporate tax may well have different interpretations and sponsors, even when, for example, there is agreement on the need to legislate on such matters.

Hence, her clear pronouncement that she will act as a democratic voice for the European Parliament augurs well, in that in the final instance she is acting as the highest representative of that specific institution. In this regard, certain local reactions to her election, from different sides of the Maltese political and civil society spectrum, say more about the parochialism and onesidedness of the respective reactions. On the other hand, it was heartening to see broad political national consensus in support of

Metsola’s candidature, and her friendly photo with Robert Abela is very symbolic in this regard. Another photo doing the rounds, namely her rejection of Joseph Muscat’s proposed handshake, shows Metsola’s strength of character, but she well knows that at European level she will be negotiating with different voices, interests, and representatives. The European Parliament is about rules and procedures, and not about which photos get most likes in their respective bubbles.

At the same time, Roberta Metsola will have a challenging task in balancing out her various constituencies and sponsors: The European Parliament is what she ultimately must speak up for, but she also has a relatively conservative constituency in Malta, has to maintain close links with the erstwhile troubled-PN both for present and future happenings, and is ultimately a member of the largest pan-European political party, which, in turn, has its own contradictions, challenges and allegiances. Not to mention that Roberta Metsola has her own personal skills, ways, opinions, and networks.

Hence, in her role as EP President, Metsola will be involved not just in what sociologist Erving Goffmann dubs the ‘front stage,’ namely the parliamentary sessions in public and the media representations of such, but also the ‘backstage’ of behind-thescenes negotiations, lobbying, compromise and arrangements. Just as Metsola had to navigate between the front stage and backstage to get elected as President – which, inevitably also included getting endorsement from the social democrats, which Malta’s governing party happens to be part of – she will be required to use her skills to the maximum to navigate in her role.

To-date, Metsola has been extremely successful in such navigation, and I have no doubt that she has what it takes to do the same in her two and a half years of EP presidency. What happens after that is everyone’s guess. What matters now is that this is Metsola’s moment of glory, and all Malta should be proud of this great, inspirational achievement.

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