

# EXPERIENCE AND CREDIBILITY

Colin Fitz discovers how Economist and first time PL general election candidate PROFESSOR EDWARD SCICLUNA's career has taken him through various academic and professional experiences in many countries including Canada, the UK and the US, to his current position as an MEP.

Teacher, University Professor, Consultant, European Parliamentarian, and now... candidate for the Maltese elections. At first glance, the upward trajectory of Edward Scicluna's career seems to be taking a detour, but this softly spoken, Rabat-born intellectual who credits strong family values as the basis for his success, doesn't see it that way.

"I may be thought of as an 'Economist' or 'Academic' but everything I have ever studied has always had a tangible and immediate relationship with real life. The sort of economic work I have pursued hasn't been the 'detached' intellectual type, seeking knowledge for its own sake, but the sort that influences government policy where it matters: on the ground. In fact, courses I took in Oxford were more in the realm of Political Economy, a combination of Philosophy, Politics and Economics. In Canada the emphasis was more on the quantitative and applied side," he explained, as we settled on his commodious, orange sofa in his home in San Pawl tat-Tarġa. It is a pleasant, welcoming bungalow, fastidiously kept by Edward's wife Astrid, no stranger to academic pursuits herself, having spent some years studying Social Anthropology at the same University as her husband in Canada, shortly after they married.

Scicluna doesn't strike me as the kind of politician who simply spouts off at everything under the sun – the kind of low-intellect



## ↓ DETAILS

**Hometown:** Rabat, lives in San Pawl tat-Tarġa  
**Family:** Wife Astrid, son Mark, daughter Katya  
**Education:** The Lyceum; St Michael's College of Education, Universities of Malta, Oxford, Toronto, (PhD in Economics)  
**First Job:** Teacher  
**Current job:** Vice-Chairman, ECON, European Parliament, Professor of Economics at the University of Malta  
**Hobby:** Sailing  
**Favourite book:** *Going for Growth 2012* ("An OECD thriller – just kidding")  
**Preferred economic philosopher:** Joseph Stiglitz  
**Favourite music:** Classical music; Winter Moods  
**Favourite film:** *Australia*  
**Last holiday:** A six day motor-dash along Sicily's coastline (quicker than sailing when time is at a premium)

Photo by Jacob Sammut - Pearls.com

in touch with the people, as is happening in certain Southern European countries at the moment; but it depends on your personality. You must be able to mix with people from all walks of life and not live in an ivory tower. But it's possible to be able to combine academic excellence in a field and be political savvy. In many governments I'm familiar with, including in the United States, many politicians are not only graduates but on the teaching and research staff of universities."

But, I proposed, if he does make it to National Parliament, and perhaps further, he will have to make that leap from advising, which he has done very well for decades, to actually implementing policies, not all of which may be universally popular. He smiled and recalled an anecdote in reply.

"Back in 1998, Eddie Fenech Adami kept me on as Chairman of the Malta Financial Services Authority (he had been nominated for the post by Alfred Sant two years earlier), once remarked to me that Economists and advisors can advise him till the cows come home, but it was him who would have to carry the can and face the people... so, yes, not every Economist will enjoy sticking his own neck out to implement the policies that he believes in and are best for the country, but I feel I am ready to take up this challenge. Yes I am prepared."

Indeed, Scicluna is obviously a very determined man who has done very well for himself

while earning the respect of all those he has worked for or with, in Malta and abroad. One look at his CV shows how he was trusted by both sides of the local divide to serve with the Electoral Commission during some of Malta's hottest political periods; he has chaired both the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development and the Malta Financial Services Authority been Director of the Central Bank, a member of the Malta-Euro Changeover Committee... the list goes on. Despite always being known to harbour personal left of centre beliefs, right wing Nationalist ministers have also taken him along on international missions and he has also been commissioned to prepare key National reports for the United Nations – all of which he is very proud of.

"I have been involved in one way or another in public service for our country's advancement for the last 25 years. I strongly believe that public service doesn't mix with politics and I gave my unbiased and, I like to think, useful, contribution to ensuring that we have prosperity in our nation over the years," he said.

Meanwhile, apart from the years he spent studying and working abroad, he is still regularly consulted by international credit rating agencies for his opinions on Maltese and regional economic situation, apart from, of course, the high regard he is kept in at the European Parliament. →

opportunistic who gives the profession a bad name. He seems to have a very attractive academic approach to whatever he is asked to comment upon, yet, it is an

approach wrapped in, as he describes it, a politician's skin, something one has to embrace if he or she is going to enter the arena. With calls being made from some

quarters for more academics (technocrats) to be allowed cabinet positions in Government (Italian Mario Monti style), here is one person who seems to fit the

bill – with the added benefit that he has actually been elected in the European Parliament – and now is seeking re-election, this time for the National Parliament.

But this image is not without its drawbacks. "You can get branded a 'technocrat', with the implication that you are a little politically naïve and not



With ECB President Mario Draghi



With Nobel Prize Winner Robert Mundell



With Commissioner Olli Rhen



With Commissioner Barnier



With Eurostat DG Walter Radermacher



Chairing an ECON meeting



Speaking at an international conference

“I am very happy serving in the European Parliament as a member of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, and I am proud of being recognised for my expertise in my fields. My proudest moment was probably when I was chosen by Baroness Ashton (First Vice President of the European Commission) to lead a 120-strong EU team as observers in the recent Ugandan elections. The world was looking up to us to confirm that the election was ‘free and fair’, which, after a lot of anguish we finally decided that it was.”

Since being elected an MEP (on a PL ticket in 2009) Scicluna has been appointed Vice-Chairman of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, the EP’s representative on EUROSTAT’s Advisory Committee, a member of the Delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and substitute member on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and



Professor Scicluna during a European Parliament plenary session

Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean. But he has also felt it was his duty to keep people back home informed.

And yet, here he is, accepting the ‘challenge he couldn’t refuse’ to come back and play the local political game put to him by PL leader Joseph Muscat.

“I was asked to form part of the team that aims to take Malta ahead thanks to good governance. I feel we need a new style of doing things: that is the crux of the matter. Some people ask

where we are going to get the money from to improve things. I feel that is not the right question to ask. It’s the good governance in marshalling Malta’s resources and applying them to the right priorities that will make the difference.

“Public finance is the biggest challenge for any government today. Our country’s debt simply hasn’t been reined in. It’s actually been growing in both absolute and relative terms,” he said, getting quite animated. “Take for example my two children who are married. Of course it is right for them and their families to shoulder the burden of debt for things they will be using throughout their life-time. But why should they have to shoulder the massive interest burden created by past mistakes the current administration has made in, for example, the energy field?”

Scicluna added that he believes Malta has done well in certain sectors, but the energy field is one of the ones that it really ‘messed up’ as he called it. “I’m the

type to be very careful with my words, but I say this with full responsibility,” he said.

“At this stage, with the arrival of my grandchildren, my vision has been coloured by thoughts about the future and what legacy we are going to leave for our descendents, and I see that as my political mission from now on. The first task will be to stabilise the public debt, not try quick-fix solutions to try and reverse it quickly. The mistakes of 25 years cannot be fixed in a mere five years. Neither will I suggest an austerity programme – to me that is a kiss of death – but we must do what we can to avoid getting caught on the EU radar screen – so it doesn’t barge in and start recommending that we start austerity programmes like it has done in other Mediterranean EU countries.”

To conclude, I asked Professor Scicluna about the secret of his success.

“Hard work,” was his immediate answer, followed by: “Trying to stay calm and keeping one’s eye on the priorities. Develop your mental strength by reading a lot. And surround yourself with the family’s support. I wouldn’t have got where I am today without the love and care of my family, especially my wife Astrid. She has been the rock, and I look forward to spending more time with her, and the family, in between bouts of work, whether in the European or National Parliament.”



Relaxing with the family: wife Astrid, son Mark and daughter Katya

## CAREER

Edward Scicluna graduated from the University of Oxford with a Diploma with distinction in politics and economics; from the University of Malta with a First Class Honours BA degree in Economics, and the University of Toronto with a Masters and Doctorate in Economics.

He was appointed Professor and Head of Department of Economics at the University of Malta; Chairman of the Malta Council of Economic and Social Development (MCESD), Chairman of the Malta

Financial Services Authority (MFSA), Electoral Commissioner, Central Bank Director, MIB Ltd director, Chairman of political discussion programmes organised by the Malta Broadcasting Authority (MBA), Chairman of the HSBC’s Malta Funds Sicav plc and Structured Funds Sicav plc, Chairman of CWG plc, director at San Antonio Hotel and Spa, and board member of the National Euro Change-over Committee (NECC).

Internationally he carried out

consultancy work for the EU Commission, UNESCO, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), and for the governments of Albania, Croatia, Libya and Turkey; served on the Council of Europe Development Bank Auditing Committee. He is sought for his advice by the IMF delegations to Malta and the Rating Agencies – FitchIbca, Standard&Poor’s, and Moody’s. Five years ago he was appointed as a Euro expert by the EU Commission. ([www.edwardscicluna.com](http://www.edwardscicluna.com))