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## Gonzi spikes Muscat's motion



Gonzi will change Parliament's timetable to bypass the lack of a pairing agreement between the two sides of the House

### PM to change House timetable in bid to buy time ahead of debate on Cathedral extension

MATTHEW VELLA

LAWRENCE Gonzi yesterday tabled a procedural motion to change parliament's timetable for the first time in 30 years, in a bid to buy time ahead of a private motion by Joseph Muscat to stop EU funds for the extension of St John's Co-Cathedral.

The procedural motion comes after a ruling by the Speaker of the House on Monday, against the Opposition's request to adjourn the House on Thursday, and debate Muscat's motion.

Muscat's motion calls on government to revoke its backing for the Cathedral project, which has €14 million in EU funds approved by the Planning and Priorities Coordination Division (PPCD) of the Office of the Prime Minister. The motion notes the presence of Malta's Permanent Representative to the EU, Richard Cachia Caruana, as one of the members of the Co-Cathedral Foundation, "which presence – in the absence of a clear indication of the government priorities for the use of EU funds – creates a conflict of interest".

But Gonzi also has to contend with the fact that PN backbencher Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando has spoken very strongly against the extension of the Cathedral

to house its armoury in an underground vault, having even called on government to divert the funds to more deserving initiatives. Pullicino Orlando has refused to declare his voting intentions on the motion tabled by Muscat.

Muscat's motion and Gonzi's strategy were in fact discussed yesterday during a PN parliamentary group meeting.

Gonzi's motion seeks to change the timetable of the House, so that when a division (a vote) is called, it will be taken on the following Wednesday. That way, government – which has a one-seat majority – can ensure it will have all its members present for the vote.

The new motion says changes to the timetable are needed because ministers and MPs occasionally need to be away on official business, and no pairing agreement yet exists between the two sides.

Government Whip David Agius said that ministers and MPs were often occupied with EU business and that they have a duty to attend EU and other international fora.

He said the changes were needed so that the House could function effectively in the absence of a pairing arrangement – eight months after parliament opened. The PN accused Labour of hindering the

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## George Abela had been proposed for President in 2004

LAWRENCE Gonzi had first proposed George Abela for the presidency back in 2004, ahead of Eddie Fenech Adami, this newspaper can confirm.

Well-placed sources privy to the dealings between both Gonzi and then Opposition deputy leader Charles Mangion, confirmed that the prime minister first communicated Abela's name back in 2004.

Gonzi then had just been elected leader of the Nationalist Party, after the resignation of Eddie Fenech Adami in March 2004.

The Labour party neither objected nor accepted the suggestion to nominate their former deputy leader for party affairs.

But Abela was never nominated in the end.

Abela had resigned from the Labour Party in 1998 upon the

party general conference's decision to go for early elections. Sources said Sant did not express any disagreement with his nomination in 2004.

Labour had proposed its own list of nominees, namely former Ombudsman Joe Sammut, Yvonne Micallef Stafrace, wife of former Labour minister Joe Micallef Stafrace, and Joe Curmi, a little known former senior

civil servant.

Despite the absence of any disagreement between the two sides, it was Eddie Fenech Adami who would be appointed president in 2004. The Prime Minister communicated his decision to opt for Fenech Adami to then Labour deputy leader Charles Mangion. Gonzi had insisted that the decision was final and non-negotiable.

Gonzi faced a great deal of flak for his choice, while Fenech Adami publicly acknowledged the resentment surrounding his appointment in his inauguration speech.

Abela, who was nominated for the presidency by Gonzi three weeks ago, instead found widespread support unlike his predecessor.

Both Gonzi

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