Press Release

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MEP Thomas Bajada: “EU-UK youth opportunities must not become a privilege reserved for those who can afford them”

London, 17 November 2026 – Maltese Socialists and Democrats MEP Thomas Bajada has called for an ambitious and inclusive EU-UK Youth Experience Scheme, warning that financial barriers risks turning a historic opportunity for young people on both sides into a privilege reserved for the few.

Speaking at the eighth EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly, held at the Houses of Parliament in London ahead of Friday’s EU-UK Summit, Bajada insisted that any agreement must deliver genuine opportunities for young people, regardless of their financial background.

“This Friday, I will not celebrate an agreement that opens doors only to those who can afford to walk through them. If the opportunity to experience life across the EU and the UK depends on your bank account, then we are creating opportunities for the privileged, not for an entire generation,” Bajada stated.

With negotiations continuing ahead of the EU-UK Summit on 20 November, the Maltese MEP stressed that visa costs, healthcare charges and barriers to educational opportunities must be addressed if the proposed scheme is to fulfil its potential.

During the Assembly’s plenary session, Bajada called for a Youth Experience Scheme accommodating up to 100,000 participants annually, alongside the waiving of the UK’s Immigration Health Surcharge for participants. He argued that reducing the financial burden is essential to ensuring that young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds can benefit equally.

Bajada also directly called on European Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič and UK Minister Hamish Falconer to commit to reaching an agreement within six months on equal treatment regarding university tuition fees, including access to ‘home fee’ status for eligible EU and UK students.

For Malta, this issue carries particular importance. Generations of Maltese students have pursued higher education and specialised training at British universities, building strong academic and professional ties between the two countries. However, higher tuition fees places these opportunities beyond the reach of talented young people and their families.

Beyond education and employment, Bajada emphasised that the future EU-UK relationship must also invest in cultural and creative exchanges, opening new opportunities for young artists, performers, musicians and creative professionals to collaborate, develop their talents and build lasting connections across the Channel.

“Europe and the United Kingdom share much more than economic interests. We share generations of friendships, cultural connections, academic cooperation and creative talent. We must give young people the freedom to build on this common heritage, not put a price tag on their ambitions,” Bajada added.

“Our relationship with the United Kingdom must be built for the long term, for everyone, not for a selected few. Young people should be able to study, work, create and experience life across our borders because of their ambitions, not their family’s wealth. Economic cooperation matters, but genuine people-to-people connections must remain the backbone of our future relationship across the Channel,” he concluded.