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MALTA

Address delivered by
Minister of Tourism Edward Zammit Lewis

It is with immense pleasure that I welcome you all here today. I am sure you are all experiencing the warm hospitality that we Maltese are so renowned for.

I would like to start by immediately emphasising the challenges that the Union is facing in this day and age. It is important that we also keep in perspective the potentiality that the EU has conveyed to all member states in the form of transformational changes, by both delivering and harbouring peace, security and prosperity for our citizens. Nevertheless, the EU is currently passing through one of its most turbulent times since the Treaty of Rome, 60 years ago.

The Union has been facing major issues when it comes to migration. Referring to the Maltese Prime Minister' speech delivered during the plenary session of the EU Parliament in Strasbourg, the issue is much more pressing than it may seem to some and time is surely not on our side. Furthermore and relating to this, we have been facing issues of security linked to terrorism, while, in the meantime, Brexit has also emerged.

These have directly contributed to the re-emergence of extreme nationalism along with protectionism, xenophobia and geo-political tensions. This new face of the EU is generating widespread uncertainty, fear and potential inequalities across all European citizens.

We have been recently witnessing instability within the EU's neighbourhood, which is also directly affecting our relationships with global partners. We shall also be observing the forthcoming elections in France and Germany which, along the results of the US election, will impact the future and priorities of the Union.

In consideration of all this, we need to always keep in perspective the European citizen. Today we are presented with a situation where trust in the political agenda has been considerably diminished. Citizens are losing faith, which circumstance is leading people to a perpetual feeling of a European existential crisis. This undesirable scenario, however, must not distract us from continuing working on the European agenda which, on the contrary, should provide us with a further opportunity to ensure a more social Europe, emerging even stronger than before.

Dear Colleagues, allow me now to start presenting the way forward, always keeping in mind the Maltese Presidency's priorities. Knowing that the Single Market is a pertinent socio-economic issue in today's EU arena, the Maltese Presidency intends to evaluate the Single Market legislation with a sharper focus on the digital dimension, competitiveness and SMEs. In this regard, the Maltese Presidency foresees to further contribute to the Digital Single Market Strategy.

As Minister for Tourism, I would like to refer to the creation of the Digital Tourism Network which contributes to the shaping of new actions intended to increase the ongoing uptake of digital technologies across the tourism sector while also enhancing SMEs' inclusion within the global digital value chain.

One main priority of the Maltese Presidency is that of ensuring the security of all the citizens of our Union by contributing towards concrete action to address current regional and global challenges. Surely, one of the most devastating scenarios of the past year is the threat to safety and security brought about by the terrorist attacks which shook our continent. Continuing action on combating terrorism must remain a priority and must be addressed from different policy aspects.

Collaboration and cooperation among states is a necessity. From an EU perspective, we are pleased to note that apart from taking a broad approach towards counter-terrorism, the EU is also intensifying its efforts on this important front.

We are confident that global efforts to restore confidence in destinations affected by terrorism are pivotal towards promoting safe and seamless incoming and outgoing tourism flows. The Maltese Presidency aims to achieve significant progress on all initiatives aimed at better managing the Union's external border.

The EU has the responsibility of granting its citizens a sense of belonging which can only be brought about by strengthening peace and security within our member states. Malta is relentlessly working on this front, especially within the Mediterranean region to ensure that the free movement of persons in full security is guaranteed.

Further to this, I would like to touch upon the Valletta Summit (11-12 November 2015) and Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (27-29 November 2015) - two exceptional events enhancing Malta's profile as a country of dialogue, shared commitment to security and mutual understanding. Leaders participating at the Valletta Summit adopted a political declaration as well as an action plan designed to address the root causes of migration and forced displacement, and to enhance cooperation on legal migration and mobility. In the meantime, CHOGM2015 has witnessed Malta's highest capability to provide the optimum forum to address universal issues: migration, countering violent extremism, sustainable development and climate change.

During the Presidency Malta will be attracting a number of events, including the Malta Summit, Ministerials meetings, High Level Conferences, Seminars and other meetings which amount to a total of 240 high-level events. This is exceptional for such a small Island member-state like ours.

Social inclusion is also at the core of the Maltese Presidency. Allow me to take the opportunity to highlight the importance of national parliaments within the EU orbit. I would like to express my appreciation towards the creation of the yellow card procedure under the Lisbon Treaty. In simple terms, national parliaments may ask the Commission for a proposal to be withdrawn should one-third or more of national parliaments believe that the concerned proposal breached the principle of subsidiarity. Such a positive development will surely bring the various European citizens within each member state closer to the EU's decision-making process and in turn attract public interest towards the work done by the EU.

Before closing, allow me to emphasise the way forward for a more unified EU that can also be achieved through work done by COSAC.

- 1) Firstly, we need to work for an EU that cultivates the idea of participatory democracy. A democracy is nothing without its citizens, and therefore the latter is the main purpose for whatever we do.
- 2) Additionally, we need to invest more in continuous dialogue. Europe has a different meaning for different people and consensus can only be achieved through effective discussion.
- 3) Lastly, we must all work together to fulfil the ambitions that every new generation rightly aspires to when its turn comes along.

To conclude, I am more than certain that the Maltese Presidency will be delivering tangible results on the main topic of rEUnion in a timely and effective manner. We need to ensure that national interests do not hamper the common interest of the whole EU bloc. In this context, the COSAC and the National Parliaments are indeed a formidable and unique tool that provides a perfect platform for all of this, and it is our responsibility to ensure that it is exploited to the full.

Thank you for your attention and looking forward towards an interesting debate.