



**MALTA EU 2017**  
PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION

# **Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC**

**22 - 23 JANUARY 2017**

**MALTA**

**Welcome address delivered by  
Deputy Prime Minister Louis Grech MP**

I do not think that any of you need to be told, that we, have assumed the presidency at a time when the EU is in a state of flux and uncertainty.

Allow me to get immediately to the crux of the matter.

Our presidency comes at a testing and challenging time as the Union seeks to reassure its citizens about its relevance and sustainability.

Mass migration movements, security concerns, economic strife, citizen disillusionment, terrorist attacks and Brexit have made us all pause and reflect.

Brexit remains an undefined concept, but British Prime Minister Theresa May has now made an opening pitch for the negotiations.

While it is clear that an *à la carte* menu will not be on the EU's table, we continue to hope for a fair and balanced outcome and expect to see the situation evolve over time.

Having said that, however, we have to make every effort not to allow our resources to get unduly diverted by the management of UK exit, complex as it might be.

While we must not underestimate the potential impact of any of the issues I have mentioned, we should draw strength from the knowledge that throughout its 60-year history ..... which we will celebrate in Rome in March ..... challenges are nothing new for the EU project.

Notwithstanding these setbacks, Europe has thrived ..... Peace and freedom reign in a region once riddled with conflict and oppression .....

while citizens have seen benefits which they never thought possible in their lifetime.

Yet while it is right that we celebrate these fine achievements ..... we must also recognise that modern-day phenomena have contributed to the re-emergence of extreme nationalism, protectionism, xenophobia and geo-political tensions. We must recognise, too, that these phenomena, which contrast sharply with our ideals, carry the risk of derailing the European project.

We need to address concretely the uncertainty, fear and inequalities felt by the European citizen.

Currently a significant number of citizens feel that national responses to the issues of Economy, Security and Migration are far more effective than the European ones.

The E.U will have to adapt to reflect realities that are emerging.

Current situations hopefully have served as a wakeup call.

A wakeup call that should not lead to any knee jerk reaction.

Europe is facing a perceived divide between North and South

There is also a lack of stability in the EU's neighbourhood as well as uncertainties about our relationship with global partners.

Taken in isolation, these issues can be considered difficult problems. But when combined they amount to a crisis on a level the continent has not seen in its 60 years of history.

Make no mistake ..... Europe is at a crossroads and what happens in the next 12 months ..... during which time we will also see crucial elections ..... will define its future.

We cannot sit idly by as passive spectators ..... On the contrary, we all have a duty to take a leading role in turning the situation around.

Talk of an existential crisis within the Union has become an accepted norm .... and it would be a big mistake if we underestimate the size of the challenge that lies before us.

However, it would be an even bigger mistake to accept the status quo ... rather than be disheartened, our duty is to come up with an exceptional reaction ...Extraordinary times call for extraordinary efforts.

How should we go about this? ..... In the absence of a magic wand, the best we can do is suggest very forcefully that Europe gets back to basics ..... back with its citizens ..... and that member states show solidarity with each other ..... This is why we have themed our Presidency rEUnion ..... which has at its core ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Union and restoring belief in the European project. We believe in Europe ... our youths believe in Europe ... and we believe it has what it takes to move forward .....

Yet we know that faith among our citizens in the EU project has waned in recent years ..... And it is our responsibility to take the right steps at this juncture to make them believe in the European project.

The first thing we need to do is put them at the centre of our decision-making processes ..... as they are the real protagonists of the Union.

We should treat the complex challenges before us as an opportunity ... to react to the rapid pace of change ... through our decision-making processes ... to listen to our citizens ... by readjusting our focus to see the Union through THEIR eyes ... to bridge the internal differences that exist between us ... by redoubling our positive action.

We know that reform is necessary. The process starts with agreeing the concepts for Europe's future in a changed world ... to agree on the fundamentals of a sustainable and viable Union ... without letting seemingly important matters derail us from the imperatives ...

Let's be honest, the decision-making process in Brussels has at times been detached from the real-life concerns of European citizens ..... This has eroded credibility which in turn is caused by a deficit in the implementation of these decisions ..... the gap between words and action. We must address this.

We need to have the courage to review and reform whatever is lacking and to remove, or improve, stagnant concepts and thinking.

At this delicate time, we must focus on the issues that address the legitimate concerns and expectations of our citizens.

The Maltese Presidency has to be seen against this backdrop.

On migration, Member States need to deliver on the promises and commitments made ... and practise the value of solidarity.

That Europe, that should be safe and secure, and take action to mitigate security challenges in the face of a constant terrorism threat.

While at the same time focusing on a neighbourhood policy that promotes a more stable environment for the troubled regions that surround us.

That Europe should be socially inclusive, equitable and just ... and strive to narrow the gap in financial inequality ... amongst others ...

The core values and the rule of law that underpin the EU's very existence should be upheld.

It should promote job creation and economic growth, and it should strengthen and complete the single market which is the main motor and catalyst for economic revival.

That Europe should work harder to create a healthy and sustainable environment ... one that promotes measures to combat climate change ... and promote innovative research and activity in the maritime industry.

These are the priorities of our Presidency. These are the measures we believe will make Europeans feel their citizenship gives them added value ... and make them feel the policy agenda is being seen through THEIR perspective.

My colleague and friend, Edward Zammit Lewis, will address the Presidency priorities in more detail ...

Our priorities centre on fundamental pillars of the Union which, we believe, should remain on the agenda long after Malta's Presidency.

We should be optimistic notwithstanding the challenging times.

National Parliaments have a significant role to play.

Together with the EU Institutions, parliaments are the means through which citizens take part in the decision-making process - And here I wish to thank F. Timmermans who is doing an excellent job on the interinstitutional relationship. This is the concept we need to make a reality .....

With the right leadership, sense of vision and in-built flexibility ..... the Union will adapt, change and evolve to forge a strong dynamic and vibrant Europe for our young people and future generations ..... who will look back on this time as a watershed moment for the EU ..... a time when European leaders recognised what was at stake and rose to the occasion ..... a time when they had the courage to reform and redefine the Union.

In conclusion, I have full faith that the Union will succeed if it manages to instil a sense of hope and optimism, and if it makes citizens feel ..... once again ..... that they are getting value added from belonging to this great Union of nations that works in unison to enrich their lives. Time is of the essence. What happens short-term will define the future of Europe.

I wish you all a successful and fruitful conference which I am certain will produce positive and concrete conclusions.

