

LVII COSAC 29 May 2017 KEYNOTE SPEECH REFLECTIONS ON THE MALTESE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Fellow Parliamentarians,
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by expressing my pleasure of having this opportunity today to speak to you about the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU. As we enter into the last month of the Maltese Presidency, we are very well placed to reflect on what we have managed to achieve during these months. Taking over the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the first time since joining the Union in 2004 was undoubtedly an important milestone for our country a huge challenge and one that has filled us all with great pride, besides putting on our shoulders great responsibilities.

The Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union has taken place in very challenging times for the Union. The disconnect between the administration and the man in the street is palpable. The Rome Declaration, adopted on the 60th Anniversary of the Rome Treaties, emphasized that the European citizen has to be put back at the core of its vision for the years to come.

Excellencies,

As you are aware, Malta chose to focus on six main priority areas for its Presidency namely Migration, Security, Neighbourhood, the Single Market, Maritime and Social Inclusion.

Identifying **Migration** as one of the key priorities for Malta's Presidency could not be more timely. Migration is here to stay and there is no short-term solution to overcome this challenge. No country can manage migration challenges on its own – it is important for the EU to act in unison, in cooperation with countries of origin and transit. The 2017 Maltese EU Presidency has seen the Council making significant strides towards better control and management of borders, documentation, and the entry-exit system. This term has also seen the Malta Summit, concluded with the agreement on the Malta Declaration on the external aspects of migration; which was soon followed by the endorsement of joint conclusions reaffirming the Joint Valletta Action Plan at a summit officials meeting – the result of the 2015 Valletta EU-Africa summit on migration.

Speaking of migration, I would like to underline the importance of solidarity with countries on the front-lines, not only those among EU Member States, but also others at the international level. The Maltese Presidency has been steering the EU

agenda on the follow-up to the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, with the aim of providing EU delegations in New York and Geneva with guidelines in preparation for the upcoming informal thematic consultations that shall feed into the two Global Compacts to be adopted in 2018. We hope that these guidelines shall allow for the EU's voice to be heard more prominently on the international stage, in which the EU has a key role to play.

The media, report extensively upon migration, particularly during times of crisis, yet it is clear that the narrative is often negative and that holistic reporting remains an exception. It is with this principle, that together with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the collaboration of the EU-funded projects of Euromed Migration IV and Open Media Hub, we launched a Migration Media Award. The aim of this initiative on June 14 is rewarding the excellence, relevance and newsworthiness of a number of journalism pieces that will be submitted dealing with migration especially those bringing out the positive aspects of migration as well as the opportunities presented by this phenomena.

An issue pertaining to Migration which Malta has sought to explore in the past months is for the international community to disrupt illicit business models by addressing the remaining gaps that exist which smugglers and traffickers can take advantage of, in their illicit operations, when it comes to the transfer and export control of certain goods to countries of transit. We believe that through a legislative proposal such gaps can be addressed at a European Union level.

Furthermore, visa liberalisation for Georgia was endorsed, while the visa liberalisation regulation for Ukrainian citizens travelling to the EU was adopted. The Council also agreed to kick-start negotiations with China for an agreement on the facilitation of the issuance of short-stay visas.

Moving to the second priority that of **Security**.

This has been very prevalent in the minds of many of our citizens. It is imperative that our citizens feel safe; Our borders should be friendly, but secure. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris, Berlin, London, Stockholm and more recently Manchester, terrorism has continued to be at the forefront of our collective security concerns, demonstrating the universality of the phenomenon - one that knows no borders. More importantly, we have come to realise that indeed the security in Europe and security outside of Europe, particularly in our neighbourhood (the Mediterranean) are interlinked. The internal-external nexus of security remains key in addressing the threat.

During the Maltese Presidency the Council adopted a Directive to combat terrorism which includes a new set of measures to respond to the evolving threat of terrorism. It also adopted a Directive on the fight against fraud to the financial interest of the Union; and Conclusions on the EU global strategy in the area of security and defence. There is no doubt that the terrorist threat is a long-term one and in order to address such a threat one needs to adapt to its versatility and to respond in a timely and

concerted manner. This is crucial. In this regard, it is hoped that, in the coming weeks, Council Conclusions on Counterterrorism will be adopted.

Excellencies,

The Presidency was also an opportunity to make sure that the situation in our **Neighbourhood** stays high on the European agenda. In recent years, partner countries have experienced radical transformation. The political instability in Libya, the war in Syria and the volatile situation in the eastern neighbourhood especially Ukraine, have made our immediate neighbourhood one of the most turbulent regions in the world. We have worked with Algeria, Armenia, Moldova, Tunisia and others, in order to maintain and improve relations with these countries which are so geographically close to EU Member States. We have also worked towards bettering the situation in Ukraine as well as that in Syria. **The first line of action of the EU is and must remain its diplomatic work.** The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) – an integral part of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) - has a crucial role to play in this, and it can help neighbouring countries grow and prosper if used to its full potential. The Western Balkans is another crucial region that we cannot afford to lose sight of. In transmitting our hope for a European destiny for these countries, as Presidency, we steered the EU to give an impetus to discuss foreseeable or desirable prospects as well as policy-oriented issues with the Western Balkan countries themselves. The pace of negotiations and the progress achieved in the EU path of Western Balkan countries were determined by the progress achieved on the ground, in particular in fundamental areas such as the rule of law, fundamental rights, public administration reform, and economic governance. An Inter-Governmental conference held in Brussels allowed Serbia to open a chapter on enterprise and industry policy and provisionally close the negotiating chapter on education and culture. Central to Malta's Presidency was the resolve to ensure that the European course of Western Balkan countries is honoured and respected. The Union will not be complete until the Western Balkans are part of the common European family.

It is also Malta's firm belief that relations between the EU and 'the neighbours of our neighbours', including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and its Member States, should be further consolidated. The Maltese Presidency has prioritised the revitalisation of relations and the stepping-up of multi-level cooperation with both the GCC and its Member States.

We remain convinced that the key to resolving crises lies in diplomacy and dialogue. Malta has invariably been an avid supporter of the enrichment of synergies between initiatives such as the Anna Lindh Foundation, the Union for the Mediterranean and the 5+5 Western Mediterranean. Their distinct mandates are a complementary component of laying the foundations of a promising future for the Euro Mediterranean region.

Malta has consistently emphasised the need to enhance cooperation between the EU and its southern neighbours, and continues to support the projects-based approach of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) as an important means to bridge the gaps

between policy-making and concrete projects. The UfM has very much to offer in tangible terms through the development of capacity-building projects in various sectors, including the need to support job creation and entrepreneurship, especially among youth. The adoption of the UfM Roadmap in its third operational phase (2016 onwards) at the last UfM Foreign Minister's Meeting held in Barcelona on January 2017 is a clear reflection of the potential that can still be pursued in this regard.

It is only through empowering the younger generations and by creating and providing employment that radicalisation and threats to democracy can be properly addressed. Malta was proud to host the ALF MED Forum in October 2016, a landmark event for regional cooperation. The active participation of a large number of delegates was inspiring, while the global reach and visibility provides a platform for future action. The launch of Young Mediterranean Voices represented a major outcome that needs to be followed-up adequately. On 23 March 2017, HRVP Mogherini expanded this initiative by launching the 'Young Med Voices Plus', aimed at opening channels to youth agencies across the Mediterranean through communication and advocacy action to discuss global issues with EU high-officials and create innovative solutions to common challenges.

In April, Malta hosted the launching of the Intercultural Trends Survey results of the Anna Lindh Foundation, which complements the successful outcome of the ALF MED Forum. The Survey investigated what people see as critical aspects of life in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and the key similarities and differences they note between themselves and those living from other countries and cultures. These initiatives confirm Malta's ongoing support and commitment to foster and facilitate intercultural dialogue within the Mediterranean region.

Sub-regional frameworks such as the 5+5 Dialogue also have a salient role to play in Mediterranean security, in view of its relevance in the current Mediterranean context and its ability to promote dialogue, increase confidence between major actors, and exchange information, thereby amplifying the collective efforts to tackle those issues affecting stability in the region. It is also pertinent to note that the Defence pillar of the 5+5 Dialogue has been particularly effective as it provides an excellent platform for training opportunities and sharing of best practices in the field. Indeed, earlier this year, Malta organized the first Module of the 5+5 Defence College under the subject "Air Search and Rescue – A shared SAR challenge in the Western Mediterranean Sea" that was held on February 2017.

One of the priorities of the Maltese Presidency is the deepening of relations and engagement with the Arab world. Malta remains committed to the EU-League of Arab States (LAS) Dialogue, especially through the European Commission-League of Arab States Liaison Office (ECLASLO), which was inaugurated in Malta on October 2009. This is the only structured dialogue linking the European Commission and the LAS.

Excellencies,

As a maritime state, Malta has continuously reiterated its commitment towards the achievement of the goals set by the international maritime community. In the **Maritime Sector**, Malta has focused on furthering the EU Integrated Maritime Policy, which adopts a holistic approach on all maritime and marine issues, and the expansion of the Blue Economy as part of the Blue Growth Initiative. We have also worked on improving the financial transparency of ports, as well as on other maritime issues, such as defining the specifications of fishing vessels and regulating the registration of persons sailing on board passenger ships. The Maltese Presidency has also continued to consolidate the EU and its Member States' collective efforts in the current negotiations for the development of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. The recently adopted Council Conclusions on International Ocean Governance, together with the related Joint Communication, have successfully put forward a more coherent, comprehensive and effective EU policy to improve the international ocean governance framework and to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of oceans.

Excellencies,

Our citizens' remain at the core of every policy, every action, every decision. During our Presidency we prioritised the Single Market – the European Union's greatest financial asset. We have made great progress in the involvement of consumers in policy-making and in the enforcement of consumer protection laws. The Council has worked hard on tackling corporate tax avoidance by closing down 'hybrid mismatches' with the tax systems of third countries. In the digital age, we cannot expect a renewed spirit of community unless our citizens are able to connect to one another. That is why we have pushed the Digital Single Market; we have agreed with the European Parliament on the proposal for a decision on the use of the 470-790 MHz frequency band in the Union, as well as on the rules for wholesale roaming markets, and on cross-border portability of online content services.

We have worked hard on the energy sector, reaching a provisional agreement with Parliament on the framework for energy efficiency labelling, while also continuing negotiations with them concerning measures to safeguard the security of gas supply and negotiations on organic farming. The Council has also worked on the review of the Emissions Trading Scheme and on establishing a mechanism for the exchange of information between Member States and third countries in this sector. We have agreed on new EU rules improving the safety of medical devices.

As a country, which has seen great strides under the theme '**Social Inclusion**', in recent years, in the past months, much work has focused in this sector. Conclusions on the European Solidarity Corps and on High Quality Education; on enhancing the skills of women and men in the EU labour market and on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child were adopted. The Maltese EU Presidency has also continued negotiations with the European Parliament on the implementation of

the Marrakesh Treaty, which regards the copyright of works for the benefit of blind, visually impaired, and otherwise print disabled persons.

Focusing on the six priorities of our Presidency, does not mean that work did not continue or progress in other priority areas for the Union. To the contrary, Malta also worked relentlessly on other dossiers.

As regards **Development**, we focused on the new European Consensus on Development, the External Investment Plan, the future relationship with our African, Caribbean and Pacific partners and also on the humanitarian sector. The European Consensus on Development establishes a new common vision and framework for how the EU and its Member States will work together to assist partner countries in realising the Sustainable Development Goals. We are proud that an agreement was reached.

The 2017 Maltese EU Presidency has also led the Council during revisions of the Multi-annual Financial Framework for 2014-2020, while also adopting conclusions on the Budget Guidelines for 2018, on the 2017 Annual Growth Survey, and on the Joint Employment Report. We have worked on EU climate and energy diplomacy, on long-term shareholder engagement, and on stopping the financing of armed groups through trade in conflict minerals. Together with the European Parliament, the Council has agreed on the structural reform support programme, and on extending EU funding to the European Financial Reporting Advisory Group, and we have negotiated with them on rules in the field of civil aviation and on increasing EU support for regions affected by earthquakes, floods, droughts, and other natural disasters.

In conclusion,

Six months ago, the task that lay ahead of us looked daunting. The Presidency should also not be seen in isolation but in an ever-changing European and International setting.

What definitely benefited us is wanting to do our part with a dose of realism.

Fast forward five months when we are soon entering our last and final month at the helm of the EU, the whole of Malta is proud that we were and are able to carry out our responsibilities not only to the best of our abilities, but knowing that through our size, our population, our economies of scale, our history, Malta contributed to the European project.