



MALTA EU 2017
PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION

Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

22 - 23 JANUARY 2017

MALTA

**Welcome address delivered by
Hon. Angelo Farrugia MP, Speaker of the House of
Representatives**

Esteemed colleagues

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Merħba, u bi pjaċir nilqagħkom ġewwa l-gzejjer Maltin. F'isem il-Parlament u l-kollegi miż-żewġ naħat tal-Kamra nixtieq nesprimi s-sodisfazzjon li l-Parlamenti Nazzjonali jkomplu jiltaqgħu f'fora interparlamentari bħal ma hija l-COSAC u jiddiskutu b'mod liberu dawk il-kwistjonijiet u sfidi li l-aktar joħolqu diżgwid.

Allow me to continue my address in English

It is indeed a great pleasure to welcome you to the smallest member state of the EU, with a geographical size of just 315 square kilometres. Joining the European Union in 2004, Malta can be considered as a relatively 'young and novel' member state. This is our very first Presidency of the Council of the European Union. We are thrilled to launch an eventful six month programme of inter-parliamentary meeting focused to address European issues and provide members of parliament with the necessary platform to better understand ongoing challenges and jointly propose durable and long term solutions.

Due to the islands central geographical position, acting as a commercial viaduct between Europe and Africa, Malta was for a long time an important shipping port for the exchange of craftsmanship, goods and products. In more recent times Malta developed this commercial viaduct further and transformed it into a diplomatic tool to promote cooperation and regional development. Back in 1975 at the CSCE Helsinki Conference, Malta made it clear that there can be no peace and security in Europe if there is no peace and security in the Mediterranean. I strongly believe that at a 42 year time lapse, this statement should resonate more loudly in our discussions. In fact, throughout the years Malta maintained a continuous policy of promoting an inclusive and open dialogue, one which ensures that Mediterranean and Southern states are fully represented and included in the discussions. Throughout the Presidency and after, the Maltese House of Representatives will remain committed to its Euro-Mediterranean vocation and will continue to proactively engage and boost dialogue between national parliaments.

Honourable members,

With great responsibility and a humble spirit I cannot but lament that the European Union continues to face innumerable challenges, threats and instability. Ranging from the ongoing humanitarian crisis, unbalanced economic development and heightened terrorist alerts, these issues are having a direct effect on the institutional and existential survival of the Union. Furthermore, the increased perception that national governments and national parliaments have lost touch with the daily challenges faced by European citizens, continue to threaten the core principles of unity and solidarity of our shared European project.

Mindful of the challenging times and increased pressure to revamp the European project, the six priorities set out by the Maltese Presidency of the Council, therefore; Migration, the Single Market, Social Inclusion, Europe's neighborhood, Maritime Affairs and Security, seek to address the key issues in a holistic and comprehensive manner. In a parallel fashion, the Parliamentary Dimension will contribute to spur the discussion and provide additional insight to the body of knowledge. Furthermore, the Parliamentary Dimension will further promote unity and dialogue both at European, but also at a Southern and regional level.

COSAC provides the appropriate platform to engage in fruitful and prolonged discussions. Approaching its 57th edition, COSAC has proven key instrumental in promoting a greater role and opportunity of participation for national Parliaments. As we are gathered here today, it is important to highlight once more the necessity to facilitate and promote parliamentary diplomacy and ensure that the exchange of ideas and conclusions, agreed during the Plenary session, resonate into our national policies and European action plans.

The programme for today's Chairpersons of COSAC meeting and the programme for the 57th COSAC Plenary Session running between 28 and 30 May 2017 have been carefully crafted to ensure that the agenda strikes the desired equilibrium between a discussion on ongoing issues and one devoted to address practices and methods employed by national parliaments. Ultimately, the main scope of the two meetings will be that of maintaining a strong network of partners sharing the united goal of transforming the European Union into a stronger alliance of equals, geared to promote the wellbeing of its citizens and the fruitful and peaceful development of its neighbours.

I strongly believe that now the need to move towards a united front is more important than ever. The rifts and discord of the past should make way for open channels of communication, where mutual respect for diversity of

opinion and beliefs operate as the leading movers of our common project. Allow me here to highlight that by a united front I do not mean a *one size fits all* approach, but rather, a genuine and humble parliamentary movement; a movement committed to promote a Union founded on diversity of opinion and equality of participation and success. As Parliamentarians we need to ensure that the work carried out during COSAC meetings and other inter-parliamentary fora gain the necessary attention and exert the required leverage at European level.

Esteemed colleagues,

Allow me to conclude with a reference to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres's New Year's speech and plea to make 2017 a year of peace.

- Let us truly believe in the possibility of making the year 2017 a year of peace and unity.
- Let us practice peace in our daily lives and transmit to the younger generations the noble characteristics of solidarity and compassion and further promote dialogue and respect across political divides.

Finally, I too call on you, not only as members of parliament, but also as European citizens, living and working in your respective communities, to promote dialogue, unity and peace across all levels of the social sphere and together envision a shared, serene and prosperous future for all.

Thank you

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