

**Promoting better regional cooperation towards smart and  
humane migration across the Mediterranean**

**delivered by the**

**Honourable Dr Angelo Farrugia,  
Speaker of the House of Representatives,  
Parliament of Malta**

**at the**

**Opening Ceremony of the Conference  
organized jointly by the IPU and the Parliament of Malta  
in collaboration with the PAM**

**16 November 2017**

**Malta**

Colleagues,

Honourable Members,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning,

Allow me to start by welcoming you all to Malta. It is indeed a great pleasure for me, as Speaker of the Maltese Parliament, jointly with the IPU and in collaboration with PAM, to organize this inter-parliamentary conference discussing the role of regional cooperation in enabling humane migration across the Mediterranean.

The impact of migration on the Maltese archipelago – at the very centre of the Mediterranean – goes back centuries, with historical and socio-economic developments playing a key role in the human migration trajectory. During colonial times, that is throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Malta experienced an outward flow of its citizens, travelling to neighbouring states such as Tunisia and Algeria, but also further away such as to Australia and Canada. The lack of economic and social opportunities on the island inspired young people and budding families to seek their fortune in other richer lands. This brought unprecedented changes to the demographics of the country and shaped the relationship between the people that remained in Malta and the diaspora. To better understand the scale of the effects, one has to only mention the fact that almost all Maltese citizens have till this very day, close or distant family members living permanently overseas, and that persons of Maltese descent can be found in even the remotest places on earth.

In the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Malta developed into a stable and prosperous country, opening its channels of commerce and trade, and contributing to the movement of people between the South and the North of the Mediterranean. Emigration slowed down and only few people left the country. Malta, geographically and commercially located at the centre of the Mediterranean, cooperated closely with the European bloc and eventually joined the European Union in 2004. The new millennium presented a new set of opportunities for the island. Nonetheless, protracted and emergent conflicts at our southern borders brought to light an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, climate change, political persecution and famine in various African states pushed thousands, especially young people, to seek a better and safe alternative away from their country of origin. Whilst southern European states, such as Italy, Greece and Malta, continued to face pressures from an increasing number of people requesting assistance, it was only in 2013 that the situation escalated to unprecedented levels and which finally caught the attention of all European States.

Unfortunately, action at European level was initially slow, fragmented and lacked the necessary political will to implement a mechanism to save lives, combat migrant smugglers and provide a safe and secure place for desperate men, women and children. The tragic images following the demise of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea continued to increase pressure on European states to act in a united front and ensure no more lives are lost at sea, in the desert or across land borders. Everyone surely remembers the shocking and sad images of the lifeless body of Alan Kurdi, the three year old Syrian boy, who drowned while attempting to reach the Greek islands in September 2015. The unfolding humanitarian crisis highlighted the important link between stability and peace in the Mediterranean, and

stability and peace in mainland Europe. Furthermore, it reaffirmed Malta's position taken during the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), when the then Prime Minister Dom Mintoff proposed and underlined the necessity to recognise that security in Europe is linked to security and peace in the Mediterranean.

The last three years have been characterised by an increased effort to address the issue of migration from a political, humanitarian and security aspect. The different frameworks set up at European level promoted the centrality of having a united front and ensure that cooperation is maintained and strengthened across member states. The 4 R's: **Relocation, Resettlement, Return and Readmission**, represent the core of European action. Therefore, cooperation, dialogue and mutual understanding with countries of origin and transit countries are key to ensure the Mediterranean Sea does not become a deadly trap for migrants.

Colleagues,

Malta has been actively contributing to the debate on migration, with the 2015 Valletta Summit on Migration bringing together European and African Heads of State. The scope of the Summit was to strengthen cooperation between Europe and Africa and together address common challenges. The Valletta Summit recognised that migration is a shared responsibility of countries of origin, transit and destination. The Summit adopted a political declaration and an action plan designed to: address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, enhance cooperation on legal migration and mobility, reinforce the protection of migrants and asylum seekers, prevent and fight irregular migration,

migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and finally to work more closely to improve cooperation on return, readmission and reintegration of immigrants. A follow-up meeting to the 2015 Valletta Summit took place between 8 and 9 February 2017, again in Valletta, where senior officials met to discuss the state of play of the implementation of the Joint Valletta Action Plan.

Whilst recognizing the role of the national Government to bring forward the implementation of regulations and frameworks agreed at European or International levels, I strongly believe in the role of parliamentary diplomacy and parliamentary work. In fact, the Maltese House of Representatives has been actively promoting the role of Parliamentary diplomacy through various inter-parliamentary meetings and workshops. In the first six months of 2017, and therefore during the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Maltese Parliament organised a total of six inter-parliamentary meetings and addressed various issues, including economic, environmental, social and regional policy. Furthermore, the Maltese House of Representatives frequently hosts inter-parliamentary meetings and workshops organised by regional organizations on related topics.

In Malta, the issues of migration and the rights of refugees are close to our hearts, and as Parliamentarians we strive to raise the issue in all relevant inter-parliamentary fora in which we participate. Only a few weeks ago during the 137<sup>th</sup> IPU General Assembly in St Petersburg, we followed closely the discussion on the emergency item on ending the grave human crisis, persecution and violent attacks on the Rohingyas considered as a threat to international peace and security. Not only. Only a few days ago, at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth

Parliamentary Conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh, the Maltese Delegation – which I led – initiated a statement calling for urgent action by the international community to resolve the ongoing humanitarian crisis facing the Rohingya community in Myanmar, which statement was unanimously adopted during the closing General Assembly. Furthermore, two Members of the Maltese delegation – on their own steam – joined the British delegation to visit a Rohingya camp to see first-hand the plight of this persecuted community.

Back to your work here over the next two days. Dialogue, cooperation and exchange of ideas at parliamentary level are an important complementary tool to the work of the Executive. Primarily, parliamentary diplomacy brings us, members of parliament, closer together and opens up channels of communication, thus facilitating the exchange of ideas and practices. Secondly, inter-parliamentary meetings provide Members of Parliament with the opportunity to meet key stakeholders, civil society organizations and experts in the field, thus enriching the discussion. Thirdly, these meetings, composed of members of the Government and of the Opposition, are more representative of the democratic choice of our respective constituency and therefore bring an additional and more varied input to the discussion.

From a regional perspective, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean constitutes an excellent platform and network for members of parliament from the Mediterranean region. Recognizing the importance of parliamentary diplomacy and the need to ensure that southern partners are equally and fully included in the debates, Malta was one of the pioneering countries to push for the need to set up a parliamentary assembly exclusively for Mediterranean states. For the first time, Mediterranean parliaments could enjoy a network

of equal partners discussing how to promote the prosperous and peaceful development of the region and its people. Today, more than yesterday, PAM should serve as an important network of partners and provide the right platform to discuss issues of common concern, including migration.

From a global perspective, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has been, for over 100 years, promoting global democracy through political dialogue and action. The Inter-Parliamentary Union focuses on the human rights dimension of migration, including the pull and push factors, and how these impact on human rights. The IPU addresses also ways of managing irregular migration in a manner which respects human rights whilst fighting inhuman or discriminatory treatment of migrants. In this respect, emphasis is placed on international legal and policy frameworks that exist to safeguard human rights norms. It is becoming increasingly apparent that migration can and should be a mutually beneficial situation for both sending and receiving countries, and most importantly, for migrants and their families. By following and facilitating international conferences and meetings in relation to migration, the IPU continuously brings together Members of Parliament from all around the world in the hope of finding long-lasting solutions to the challenges posed by migration.

Honourable Members,

Although the social, political and environmental factors prevailing in Malta in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century are different from those faced by African migrants in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, two matching elements stand out. In both cases, the root causes of poverty, and lack of opportunities, act as the 'push factor' that drive people out of their country of origin. In the

same way as young Maltese people in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century left the island in the thousands to seek employment and stability abroad, similarly, young people from disadvantaged countries or worse still hailing from countries with prolonged deadly conflicts and political persecution are today being 'pushed' out of their homes. Like our forefathers, people living in desperate conditions and aspiring for a better future for themselves and their children feel the need to move forward and seek a better and secure life in Europe.

I strongly believe that, parliamentary diplomacy could greatly contribute to bring to the forefront of the discussions the role of root causes and promote greater attention and resources devoted to transform the young people of today into the leaders of tomorrow. A strong political commitment to ensure that developing states provide their young people with the necessary educational and economic opportunities is urgently needed. Youth empowerment, education, good quality employment, sustainable development and inclusive regional cooperation constitute the foundations for positive and durable change. I am confident that, as Parliamentarians, we hold the tools and the power to promote these elements and ensure migration is addressed holistically and within a human rights framework.

Honourable Members,

Without prolonging further, allow me to conclude by underlining the importance of keeping in focus the role of root causes of migration and to identify means of cooperation that could seriously transform areas or situations of despair into flourishing hubs of innovation, sustainable development and peace.



I would like to leave you with an interesting observation made by the UN Secretary General António Guterres back in 2005, when he was appointed as the 10<sup>th</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:

*While every refugee's story is different and their anguish personal,  
they all share a common thread of uncommon courage -  
the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives.<sup>1</sup>*

I wish you all a fruitful deliberation and a nice stay in Malta.

Thank you

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2005/6/42b0064d4/high-commissioner-antonio-guterres-starts-work-unhcr.html>