

## **Exchange of New Year Greetings with the Diplomatic Corps**

*Address By: The Honorable Dr. Adrian Delia Leader of the Opposition and the Nationalist Party. Nationalist Party Headquarters 11th January 2018*

Your Excellency Monsignor Alessandro d'Errico

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,

Your Excellences,

It is indeed an honour as also a pleasure for me in this my first year as Leader of the Opposition in our Parliament, to welcome the New Year, in your esteemed company.

The year 2017 must have been a very busy year for the Diplomatic Community and I can well imagine that Malta's holding the Presidency of the European Union, for the first six months of the year, must have meant that the number of reports submitted to your Governments would have exceeded in number those of previous years.

The Presidency focused on our Islands considerable inter-est from the European Union Member countries, as well as from many other countries in the world. We are proud of the fact that our machinery of Government, in the Foreign Office and in other Departments, more than coped, even with the limited resources available, and performed well. The trust that our Party had expressed in our public serv-ants at the moment of our accession to the Union, has been proved justified, by the success achieved.

The task of our civil service had been rendered even more onerous by the fact that the structures of government had also to meet, concurrently, with the added challenges of a snap election.

Had the increased interest in Malta been limited to follow-ing the presidency and the general elections, it would have been all well and good, in that both events were run smoothly. Unfortunately we have also been catapulted into the limelight in the second part of last year for the murder of the defiantly courageous journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, which shocked the country and tarnished a reputation for peaceful stability and low rate of criminality that Malta had earned since Independence, and very markedly since 1987. We from the Opposition side will continue to do our utmost to ensure that justice takes its course and that this blemish on our good image be removed and the Rule of Law reaffirmed.

It seems imperative that this forthcoming year should, first of all, be dedicated to this task of repairing the great wrong of this gruesome murder. The Opposition will strive to continue to play its part in pressing for the strengthening of our democratic institutions and of that part of the machinery of government which is entrusted with internal security and the administration of Justice.

We believe that it is a primary duty of all Governments, to guarantee the safety of its citizens. We share with our friends in the Union and elsewhere, a determination to maintain the Rule of Law, which is of the very essence of democratic government. Violence, whatever its origins, criminal or terrorist, is a direct threat to all.

We as a Party in Opposition will continue to follow what has been a broadly shared consensus of our country's foreign policy, in the reference to our adherence to the aims and values of the European Union, the Council of Europe, the British Commonwealth of Nations, and to the less formal but no less real, Mediterranean Community of peoples, as well as the United Nations Organisation. In this context we are saddened to follow the negotiations for the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. We share the Maltese position that the so-called Brexit is an unfortunate development for both the whole of the Union as for Great Britain. We are particularly affected by this break, considering the longstanding ties of close friendship with the peoples of Great Britain and our continuing economic, cultural and political relations, with the country. The wishes of the British people must, of course, be respected; however, while it is obvious that Malta would be losing a formidable ally within the European Union, Malta must do its best to minimise the negative effects that such an episode is likely to have, while of course seeking to make the most of any opportunities that may arise as a result.

We view EU membership as very positive. We think that it has had a lasting positive impact on our lives and on our nation. At the beginning of 2017, it was quite evident that the EU was facing multiple existential challenges. Looking back we think that the EU has come a long way and although some challenges remain, one can safely say that the EU has closed the year in a better place than last year.

It seems to us that under the steady leadership of Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, and President of the European Council Donald Tusk the Eurozone has seen an economic recovery.

Last month, the International Monetary Fund said the recovery of the European economy was so strong that it spread to the rest of the world, and thus the European region has become an "engine for global trade" and economic growth.

This is good news for Malta because we form part of the Eurozone.

CETA is good news that will leave positive effects in the long term. The conclusion of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement is a welcome step for Malta and hopefully for the world. That is why we believe that the free trade agreement between the EU and Canada makes sense and is beneficial for Malta. We already have very close ties with Canada, not just through the historical Maltese emigration ties, but also in terms of trade and investment. Canada is Malta's 7th biggest trade partner outside the EU, when it comes to exchange of goods and services. The value of Maltese exports of goods and services to Canada reach up to €326 m and in terms of Maltese imports of goods and services from Canada the value reaches up to an impressive €538 m. We also add our support to the ongoing European Union trade negotiations in particular with Australia and New Zealand with whom we hold long standing ties, social, indeed familial, cultural and economic.

For us the European Union is not merely a huge market in which to conduct economic exchange; it is, first and foremost an area of peace, democracy, the rule of law and protection of the fundamental rights and liberties of all. From its great Classical and Christian heritage it derives the values of solidarity and respect for human dignity. The Union has proved to be a harbinger of continued peace and cooperation between its members and a protagonist of a new style of reason and

dialogue in the conduct of affairs between nations. The Union has provided a model for the economic and political relationship between nations in other continents.

We, of course, remain concerned about the situation in one of our closest friendly neighbours, Libya, and while we are pleased to note that some progress has been achieved on the ground, we are also fully aware that more needs to be done in order for a semblance of normality to return in that country. This Mediterranean, with its great historical and cultural heritage, is a region that has the potential to develop into a vibrant and lively economic, social, cultural milieu in which democracy 'with a human face' may be strongly established.

In this regard we commend the Maltese Government for keeping this matter high on its agenda particularly during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union and are convinced that some of these efforts had a direct consequence on the improvements witnessed recently. We feel that we should continue to sustain the efforts of the United Nations, particularly those of the Special Representative Martin Kobler with UNSMIL and the UN Action plan for Libya led by Ghassan Salame. We do hope that there will be Presidential and Parliamentary elections before the end of September 2018. As we are aware that our Libyan neighbours, on whose behalf we were supportive and active during the 2011 civil war, are tired of moving from one transition to another. We are behind their aspiration for the establishment an effective State that would provide stability and the basic services, in security, in public health and education. Most people in this friendly neighbouring country can no longer suffer instability, insecurity and fear.

Therefore we support the gathering momentum for reconciliation and harmony, and urge all parties to heed the popular voices and refrain from actions that in the coming month could undermine the political process. We look forward to see a responsible and unified, Libyan Government enjoying the confidence of all segments of society and do hope that we should have once again, in the near future, a Maltese Resident Ambassador in Tripoli .

We look forward to see that particular, active attention be given to our neighbours on the Southern littoral of the Mediterranean. In this regard Malta marked the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of bilateral relations with the Republic of Tunisia, a country which has made strong progress after the Arab Spring Revolution. We stand to gain by re-establishing the strong trade and political relations that obtained between Malta and the littoral States to the South. We hope that the European Union would also strengthen its position as a reliable economic and political partner of the Nations on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The presence of the Democratic values and practices proclaimed by the European Union would also consolidate the popular aspirations for the Rule of Law and respect for Human Rights and Freedoms.

Irregular Migration remains a constant challenge. While efforts have been made on a European Union level, we have experienced strong resistance to burden sharing from certain member states. We are, alas, to some degree back to the drawing board and here we do hope that past lessons and instances of best-practice be not brushed aside.

Attention should continue to be drawn to the United Nation's Global Compact for Migration, following on the New York Resolution, which aims to ensure the rights of migrants, and help re-settle them, as well as provide them with access to education and work. We do hope that a comprehensive , reasoned , and humane approach to migration becomes the norm is set. Irregular, unmanaged migration presents a threat to the lives of the migrants themselves and a great challenge to be met by recipient states.

We cannot ignore the continued threat to peace of the situation in the Holy land, now rendered more threatening by the matter of the status of the city of Jerusalem. For Christians, Jews and Moslems alike, this city does not present merely the character of another 'lay' city. Its 'holy' associations must be respected. We will continue to support all efforts by international and regional partners for the parties to overcome the obstacles that continue to block the path to peace. We remain of the position that all such decisions should include all the parties to this complex issue and that we will continue to work towards a two-state solution.

Within the wider global context we add our voice and concern about the Korean peninsula. We welcome the decision of North Korea to send a delegation to next month's Winter Olympics in South Korea and to hold talks with Seoul to ease military tension.

Climate change is definitely a massive global challenge. Given that the scientific facts on human-induced global warming are beyond dispute we support the Paris agreement.

Climate change is not only an environmental challenge but it has an impact on people's access to food, water and arable land. It is above all a security challenge which potentially may intensify migration flows and increase the number of conflicts.

I cannot conclude this address without making reference to the events of the V18, Valletta as a Capital City of Culture, the programme of which stands to be inaugurated in the next few days. It is a signal honour for our country's beloved capital city to hold the title of the European Capital of Culture even more so during the year 2018 which has been declared the European year of the Cultural Heritage. This indeed will be a unique occasion to discover and display the richness of our shared heritage, in the Arts, the Sciences and the Academic disciplines, and to strengthen thereby our sense of European identity, as well as the feeling for the common values of humanity.

**11.01.2018**