



Press Release

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**SPEECH BY THE HON. LAWRENCE GONZI, PRIME MINISTER DURING THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 5+5 DIALOGUE – AUBERGE DE CASTILLE,
VALLETTA – FRIDAY 5TH OCTOBER 2012**

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you all for this historical second 5+5 Dialogue meeting for Heads of Government.

On behalf of the people of Malta, I am honoured to welcome you in our Maltese language ó a Semitic language understood by many Arab countries and which is also an official language of the European Union.

It is a language moulded in the history of our country and of the Mediterranean Sea. This sea of ours must not be seen as a boarder that divides us but rather as a bridge that unites us as countries through history, culture, trade and above all unites us as a people.

The events that have occurred in North Africa and other parts of the Arab world are of historic proportion. We have and are still witnessing an overhaul in this region. What has happened over the past months will have profound consequences not only for the people and countries of the region itself, but also for the rest of the world, particularly Europe.

The crowds in the streets of Benghazi, Tripoli, Misurata, Tunis and Cairo have fought and laid down their lives in the name of our common values.

We have seen the people of the region express their yearning for a better future, for democracy, for the respect of fundamental rights, and for more economic opportunities, for themselves and future generations.

Their courage carries the hope and desire of a better life, greater respect for human rights, pluralism, social justice and the fundamental freedoms that are at the very core of our values.

It is with them and for them that we must work today.

Excellencies,

We are gathered here to evaluate our future within this new Mediterranean context. Our hope as European partners is to build our future relations on the potential of all the countries and people of the North African region. Our desire is to see an end to all violence once and for all. We do not want to witness anymore bloodshed.

As we all continue with our efforts in the region, we must avoid at all cost a blanket approach to all our Arab neighbours undergoing change. It is true that the uprisings in the region had many causes in common: authoritarian regimes, lack of employment opportunities, violations of human rights and the suppression of fundamental freedoms. However, each of these countries is different and it is essential to develop a tailor-made dialogue. Only this will ensure adequate support for the transition to be sustainable.

We are all aware that the process of democratisation and transition will be long. We will experience both setbacks and frustrations. While we have to, and will, focus on the short-term setbacks, we must not lose sight of our long-term goals and vision. Yes, we have witnessed rising irregular migration flows into Europe. Yes, there maybe potential civil strife and instability. Yes, there may be rising oil prices, lost investment and business. However, we know that the forces of changes that are taking place will not automatically result in stable political systems. It will take time. We must therefore weather these risks without losing sight of our long-term common objective: a democratic, stable, prosperous and peaceful North Africa.

As new governments take office, Europe must not be afraid of political actors inspired by Islam. Sharing history and a common fate around the Mediterranean Sea, all actors - European and Arab - need to address together the numerous challenges of the region. We need to engage in a political dialogue which requires mutual understanding and respect for universal values. The review of the European Neighbourhood Policy has a vital role to play in this.

The goal is clear: the promotion of deep and sustainable democracy and with it economic prosperity.

We very well know that democracy is not sustainable without jobs, shared economic prosperity, food and safety.

Meeting economic challenges is essential for the success of democratic transition underway. Governments need to deliver growth and jobs in response to the economic frustrations of the youth that were a driving force of the revolutions. Unfortunately, the tight international and European economic context together with the uncertainties brought about by the same transitions, are exerting negative pressures on trade, investment and tourism further adding to the weaknesses of the region.

It is therefore precisely for this and other challenges that we need to increase our activism to rebuild the regional cooperation framework. In many instances, regional challenges call for regional solutions. Be them political, social, economic or security related, many challenges can only be met through increased regional cooperation between key regional actors and not just political actors.

Transforming a country not only requires the political will and hard work of a legitimate government. It requires a deeper change in all society. It requires a population that understands and embraces the changes required. To this effect, we have learnt a lot about the importance of civil society in this process and this requires us to be inclusive in our cooperation efforts- inclusive with political actors, economic actors but also with civil society organisations.

Our being here today for the 5+5 Dialogue confirms our belief and desire to enhance regional cooperation. It is a clear signal that we, partner countries, want to work together towards the improvement of the Mediterranean region.

We also look forward to contribute and to engage with other regional organisations such as the Arab League and the Union for the Mediterranean. Aware of the difficulties that have plagued the process, Malta remains committed to the Union for the Mediterranean. We believe that the Union can be a catalyst for developing projects that can be supported by member states, the private sector and financing institutions.

Our being here is a commitment to discover the vast human and economic potential of our region. Malta believes that the 5+5 Dialogue is also about stronger regional educational centres, renewable energy, transport, food security, increased trade and many other initiatives that can create the growth and, more importantly, the jobs that our region needs.

Excellencies,

This is why I consider that our work here in Malta is of utmost importance.

Many of the sources of insecurity in our region are tied to tangible issues and that is why our duty is to seek tangible solutions and co-operative projects.

We are aware that these projects alone will not automatically solve the region's main challenges, but they represent shared goals that will become shared accomplishments.

This cooperative spirit will make each one of us a stakeholder in the collective security and prosperity of the region.

Thank you.