



PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

SETTE GIUGNO

2024

Valletta
7 ta' Ġunju 2024



Cover photo: Department of Information

**Official Programme and
Address by the Honourable Anglu Farrugia
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament of Malta
on the occasion of the commemoration of
SETTE GIUGNO**

Friday, 7 June 2024

Official Programme

6.15 pm Arrival of the Honourable Anġlu Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Malta at St George's Square.

The Speaker greets Honourable Bernard Grech MP, Leader of the Opposition, upon his arrival at St George's Square.

The Speaker greets Honourable Robert Abela MP, Prime Minister of Malta, upon his arrival at St George's Square.

6.30 pm Speech by the Honourable Anġlu Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Malta on the occasion of the commemoration of the Sette Giugno.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition take their places in front of the Sette Giugno Monument.

The Last Post is sounded.

A minute of silence is observed.

The Reveille is sounded.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives lays a wreath at the foot of the Sette Giugno Monument.

Laying of wreaths by the Prime Minister followed by the Leader of the Opposition, other distinguished guests, relatives of the victims and other organisations.

The National Anthem is played.

SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF SETTE GIUGNO 2024

We are gathered here today, as we have done for several years on the day of the Sette Giugno, to recall and reflect on the events of 7 June 1919, specifically the riots by the Maltese people against the British rule which took place in the street just opposite this square, a few metres away from where we are today. When one understands the context in which these riots took place, one finds that it was a period in history in which great economic and social hardships characterised our country. Amongst these I mention poverty and hunger due to high prices of basic foodstuffs such as bread. It was also a period of great political turmoil, when our country could not even rely on what is regarded to be the highest law of a country, a constitution that it deserved not only then, but for many years, a constitution which would allow the Maltese citizens to voice their opinion on the future of their country.

Three years after the 1919 Sette Giugno riots, the Maltese people were finally given the Amery-Milner Constitution, which, although very limited, was one of the main constitutional and political developments of our country. To a large extent this development is attributed to what the Maltese, with great enthusiasm and courage, did in the Sette Giugno riots.

From my research it appears that there were 64 British soldiers who were ordered not only to disperse the crowds in Valletta, but also to open fire on the crowd. Therefore I must pay tribute to the immediate victims of these protests who lost their lives during the riots, and for this reason their names are inscribed on this monument. I am referring to Emanuel Attard, Karmenu Abela, Gużè Bajada and Wenzu Dyer. I also must recall what happened in the days that followed the Sette Giugno, when others lost their lives or suffered grievous injuries as a result of gunshots and bayonet blows from these soldiers. This monument therefore serves to remind us of the events which marked an important part of our country's history.

When one reflects on the events of 1919, one cannot but detect a sense of irony considering that just a few years earlier 10% of Malta's population, i.e. more than 20,000 persons – because at the time the population in Malta amounted to around 222,000 – volunteered in World War I. History shows that more than 1,000 participated together with other Commonwealth citizens, Australians and others, in the Battle of Gallipoli in 1915. As a result

of the boldness of the Maltese people at the time, Malta earned the moniker of ‘nurse of the Mediterranean’ due to the large number of wounded ally troops brought to Malta for treatment during this period.

In the years and months preceding the Sette Giugno, the Maltese obeyed the direction of the allies in this First War, so much so that on 26 April 1919 in the Pietà cemetery a big memorial service was held in honour of soldiers from Australia, New Zealand, and Malta, who lost their lives in Gallipoli, and are buried there. A similar service was held in a packed church, that of Saint Mark, in Alexandria in Egypt, which was very popular with the Maltese community. The ceremony at the Pietà Cemetery continues to be held every year on what became known as ANZAC Day.

One cannot but also see the irony when just a few years later the British Empire of the time, instead of heeding the pleas and calls for autonomy of the Maltese who had voluntarily and fervently participated in the First World War together with the allied forces, became themselves the victims as a result of fighting for their rights, and even had shots ordered to be fired against them.

Each year as part of this commemoration I dedicate the first part of my speech to recall what happened during the tumultuous days and weeks of 1919, because it is important to understand what our forefathers had to endure so that our country could move on. This is also evidence that a country must address the problems it faces and its people must never give up. The Maltese are to be admired, because throughout their history they have shown that they are extremely resilient and in times of crisis have always shown their worth.

On the day in which we commemorate this achievement in the democratic development of our country, I would like to make some observations on what I believe remains to be done to make our Parliament more effective, more participative and above all more democratic.

I start by addressing the frequent criticism, even by MPs themselves, of the maximum speaking time in the House. Whilst noting that as in previous legislatures, at the beginning of this Legislature the House agreed to shorten the speaking time to not more than half an hour, with some exceptions in which it may be longer, it is high time that this time limit be also introduced

in the Standing Orders of the House. The need is all the more pressing now that Parliament has grown with the addition of 12 female MPs who joined Parliament after the 2022 General Election as a result of the 2020 constitutional amendment. In the current Parliament comprising 79 Members I believe – as several persons including Members have stated even publicly – that the maximum speaking time permitted should be reduced drastically and not exceed 15 or 20 minutes.

This is only one of several amendments which I believe should be made to the Standing Orders of the House to make Parliament more and more efficient. I am confident that this can be achieved with the cooperation of the two sides of the House.

I also wanted to comment on the application of the Standards in Public Life Act, which came into force towards the end of 2018, specifically with reference to reports sent to the Committee by the Commissioner for Standards in Public Life when he detects a breach of ethics by a Member of Parliament, including ministers or parliamentary secretaries. If the Committee adopts the report by the Commissioner, it would have to decide on the application of a sanction.

I agree with the Commissioner for Standards in Public Life when in his letter of 18 July 2023 on the guidelines on advertising to be observed by the members of the Executive, he stated that these guidelines should be part of the Code of Ethics for Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries which forms part of the Standards in Public Life Act. This should be done as soon as possible to ensure that the Committee has a legal basis when it has to decide whether or not there is a breach, and apply sanctions, concerning reports received from the Commissioner for Standards in Public Life with regard to members of the Executive.

According to the principle of the rule of law, a provision can only be applied if it is part of the body of laws of the country, in this case in the Standards in Public Life Act. I state this with respect to reports adopted by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in terms of article 27, where a sanction must be applied as per article 28. I ask: How can you apply a penalty when the offence is not included in the law? In such a scenario it would be the Committee itself that would be breaking the law and violating the rights of the individual as guaranteed by the Maltese Constitution and the European

Convention of Human Rights. Therefore I agree with the Commissioner for Standards in Public Life that as soon as possible the guidelines on advertising issued by his Office should be included in the law by way of a vote in Parliament in order to eliminate any legal anomalies.

Another point I want to make, as I have done on other occasions, is that both sides of the House should discuss and agree so that Parliament can adopt a mechanism whereby it could – either in a parliamentary sitting or in a parliamentary committee – from time to time discuss, as the case may be, reports and opinions forwarded by the Ombudsman to the Speaker in terms of article 22(4) of the Ombudsman Act. In this regard I note that the Chair always tables these documents in the House as soon as they are received, becoming immediately available to all the Members, but I repeat that I feel that the criticism made even by the Ombudsman himself that there is no action or discussion on them in Parliament is justified. I therefore appeal to both sides to find the opportunity to see how this could be done.

As Speaker I have been appealing for several years for a mechanism to be found whereby a citizen who feels aggrieved by words spoken about him in Parliament, has a remedy against any abuse of the parliamentary privilege enjoyed by Members of Parliament, what we often refer to as ‘citizen’s right of reply’. This is a remedy procedure found in various Commonwealth countries. For several years I have been insisting that this right be available also in Malta, and although this has been discussed, even unofficially, to date the Maltese Parliament still lacks this remedy.

How longer must we wait for an ordinary citizen to be able to exercise his right against a Member of Parliament who abuses of his parliamentary privilege in his regard? If we are talking about the rule of law, then there should also be a parliamentary remedy for a citizen who is himself the victim of abuse by a Member of Parliament when he has the protection of parliamentary privilege. It is high time that Parliament address this situation, even by way of revising the Standing Orders to include this remedy.

Whilst acknowledging that as an evolving institution Parliament must keep on striving to improve itself, I cannot but note that Parliament has kept up a steady pace of plenary sittings and committee meetings. When I compare this pace to that of other European Union and Commonwealth countries, I

believe that Parliament has one of the highest clearance rates when it comes to laws.

Undoubtedly, one of Parliament's greatest achievements this year was the unanimous election of Notary Myriam Spiteri Debono as President of the Republic last March. The significance of this achievement is to be considered in the context of the application of the recently introduced two-thirds majority requirement for the election of the President. The possibility contemplated in the Constitution of the Speaker having to serve as Acting President was thus avoided.

I would also speak about the importance of certain rulings in the past year. Amongst the approximately ten rulings delivered by the Chair I mention that given a few weeks ago where I reiterated an appeal which I have long been making: in spite of the absence of rules on taking photographs when the House is sitting, Members must keep in mind that in the country's highest institution, their behaviour should be appropriate and of example.

I also mention the instance where the Speaker had to rule on the admissibility of an amendment proposed to a motion which was being debated in the House, where an amendment to another amendment was accepted.

I also refer to the various complaints made by Members concerning replies given by Ministers to parliamentary questions. Although the Speaker does not have any remit on the replies given to these questions, this does not justify that members of the Executive give answers that do not reflect properly what is being requested of them.

I must also mention the various requests made for the House to adjourn under Standing Order 13 to discuss matters which are definite, of public importance and urgent. Whilst I believe that Parliament should be the place where the country's most important issues are debated, the Chair is bound by the application of the rules of the House and how these have been applied over the years, and certainly cannot allow debates that could, for example, prejudice the rights of persons who have yet to defend themselves in the courts.

With regard to parliamentary work, I must also speak of the role of Parliament, including of the Speaker, in the international arena, and this

particularly when we acknowledge that ongoing conflicts around us are not only destabilising the region but also the world. The conflict on the European continent between Ukraine and Russia, and the conflict in the Middle East where we are witnessing great atrocities including the senseless killing of thousands of innocent children in Gaza, are only two examples. I therefore felt the need to participate in every way possible in international fora by putting forward motions and resolutions calling for peace, constructive debate and parliamentary diplomacy in each forum. Amongst these I mention my recent participation in the Conference of Speakers of the European Union under the Spanish Presidency, and in the conference held towards the end of April in Cyprus marking 20 years of EU membership.

The same can be said for the other parliamentary delegations, including the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), where as Speaker I was elected to the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law. There I am working tirelessly in favour of the rights of refugees and persons who had to leave their country of birth or residence because of unrest or conflict.

The engagement of the Maltese Parliament in the international context does not only take place abroad, but also locally. For example, in my office I recently met the Leader of the Belarus Opposition, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and a parliamentary delegation from Belarus, where I emphasised the need to take forward the cooperation between the Maltese Parliament and the parliamentary delegation in exile for democracy to return to Belarus.

I am a strong believer in the role of the Maltese Parliament in contributing in every way possible towards peace amongst the nations.

I believe that like our forefathers we should continue to work and take those decisions which keep the Maltese Parliament alive and relevant to what is happening not only around us locally but also abroad. I add that when one looks back at the parliamentary developments over the past hundred years or so of parliamentary democracy, one understands how important it is in a thriving parliamentary democracy to always reflect on what we have done, what we could have done better, and what we need to do better for those who will come after us in order to continue improving and strengthening our Parliament so that we can continue doing our utmost to always meet the aspirations of the people. This undoubtedly requires the cooperation and

commitment of all the Members of Parliament, and thus I take this opportunity to thank all the Members of Parliament who are the most essential part of the Legislature.

I believe that this annual Sette Giugno event, intended to commemorate and appreciate what our forefathers have endured, should keep on giving us the necessary courage and energy to continue strengthening this country's highest institution, not only for the good of our country today, but also for future generations.