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Public finances are entrusted to the State by the people, and accountability must follow – Speaker Anġlu Farrugia

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Anġlu Farrugia, has said that public finances are not merely figures in a budget, accounts or reports, but resources entrusted to the State by the people. Every person entrusted with the administration of public funds, he said, must therefore be ready to give a clear and honest account of how those funds are used, stated Speaker Farrugia when delivering the keynote address at the European Court of Auditors Summer School, held at the Grandmaster’s Palace in Valletta, in the presence of representatives of the European Court of Auditors, national audit institutions, Members of Parliament, academics and public officials.

He said that public audit should not be regarded as a technical exercise limited to accounts, controls, reports and recommendations. Its true value lies in examining whether public power has remained faithful to its purpose, and whether funds raised from citizens have been used properly, effectively and in the public interest. In this context, the Speaker underlined that when Parliament approves public expenditure, its responsibility does not end there. On the contrary, a deeper responsibility begins: to ensure that expenditure has achieved its purpose, delivered value to the people, addressed identified weaknesses, and enabled the administration to learn from what has been placed before the House by the Auditor General. For this reason, he said, audit reports should never become documents tabled in Parliament and then forgotten. A report must lead to questions, explanations and, where necessary, correction. Where the same shortcomings continue to appear year after year, Parliament must have the courage to ask why. Where recommendations are ignored, it must ask who is responsible.

Speaker Farrugia noted that confidence in public institutions can also be affected when shortcomings are left unaddressed over time. Recommendations that are not implemented, controls that are ignored, reports that are noted but not followed up, and public bodies that promise improvement only to return with the same deficiencies all weaken the seriousness with which public administration is perceived. “Accountability without follow-up is unfinished accountability,” the Speaker said. “And unfinished accountability is dangerous because it gives the appearance of scrutiny while allowing the substance of failure to continue.” At the same time, he made clear that audit should never be understood as an exercise in humiliation. The best audit report, he said, is not the one that embarrasses, but the one that improves the State. Speaker Farrugia added that those who act in good faith should not fear transparency. On the contrary, they should welcome it, because scrutiny based on facts helps distinguish responsibility from negligence, and public service from self-interest.

The Speaker also placed this message within today’s wider European and international context, which he described as a reality of “new world disorder”, marked by geopolitical instability, war, inflation, migration pressures, climate risk, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity threats, defence and security expenditure, European funds, public-private partnerships, emergency spending and increasingly complex financial systems. Against this background, he said that audit must be capable of following complexity without being



PRESS RELEASE

captured by it, while Parliaments must remain capable of understanding that complexity without surrendering their duty to scrutinise. Referring to the European dimension, Speaker Farrugia said that the European project depends not only on ideals, treaties and declarations, but also on sound financial management, reliable evaluation and public confidence. Europe, he said, cannot ask citizens for trust while treating accountability as secondary. He also said that when public funds are mobilised in the name of war, defence, security, emergency response or solidarity, citizens have the right to ask whether those funds are reducing suffering, bringing a just peace closer, and serving the values in whose name they are spent.

Speaker Farrugia concluded by saying that public audit brings discipline in a world of disorder, evidence in a world of noise, and reassurance in a world where trust is fragile. “The true measure of public expenditure is not found only in accounts, reports or balance sheets; it is found in the confidence of the people. When the people know that their resources are protected, their trust is strengthened. And when the trust of the people is strengthened, democracy itself is strengthened,” Speaker Anglu Farrugia concluded.