

ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE ANGLU FARRUGIA - SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, PARLIAMENT OF MALTA ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMEMORATION OF SETTE GIUGNO - THURSDAY, 6 JUNE 2013

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Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Presidents Emeriti, Speakers Emeriti, Honourable Members, Honourable Senior Members, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests.

The Seventh of June is a special day for the Maltese and Gozitan people, which has remained engraved in the memory of our country as it reminds us of when in 1919 the Maltese and Gozitan people showed that with one voice, united as one nation, they fought for their rights as a Maltese Nation. It is interesting, for instance, that after our Maltese brethren were killed on the 7th of June 1919 by foreign weapons, at the first opportunity which arose during the parliamentary session 680 in 1922, Nerico Mizzi asked the following to the Head of Ministers:

“Nella prossima seduta dell’Assemblea Legislativa gli domanderà se è vero che l’Autorità Militare ha preso delle misure precauzionali in occasione del terzo anniversario del 7 Giugno 1919, occupando, sia pure in parte, certi edifici pubblici (come il terrazzo del Palazzo di Giustizia), e in caso affermativo, a richiesta di chi e in virtù di quali poteri l’Autorità Militare ha ciò fatto.”.

This clearly indicates that years after the Maltese and Gozitan people were given the Amery-Milner 1921 Constitution and the Parliamentary Assembly began to meet, the people’s voice was still suppressed due to the fact that the British military even occupied the roof of the court building in the event of another riot. It was the same Nerico Mizzi who for the first time claimed that the victims of Sette Giugno should be commemorated in the same manner we are doing today. He made this proposal during the parliamentary session of Sette Giugno 1923, when he declared:

“Propongo perciò che l’Assemblea sospenda per un quarto d’ora in segno di lutto, la seduta; e colgo questa opportunità per informare gli onor. colleghi, nella mia qualità di Segretario del Comitato Nazionale ‘Pro Caduti del 7 & 8 giugno 1919’, che un solenne funerale sarà celebrato posdimani nella Concattedrale di San Giovanni in suffragio dei nostri fratelli caduti in quelle tragiche giornate. Spero che la mia proposta sarà favorevolmente accolta dal Governo e da tutti i membri di quest’Assemblea e che nessuno

manchera` alla cerimonia propiziatoria di posdimani.”.

On that occasion there was a unanimous agreement and the parliamentary session of Sette Giugno 1923 was suspended for fifteen minutes until four in the afternoon. From that day onwards all the leaders of this country, advocated for the progress of the Maltese and Gozitan people towards achieving several rights which led them to Independence and to the removal of any foreign military influence.

The road was long but today we are a people with an identity, a sovereign nation. But more still remains to be done. After our experience of more than nine years of European Union membership, our Parliament has still not reached the desired level of autonomy which other national Parliaments enjoy within the same European Union.

When one speaks about autonomy in this context, this means that the Parliament, the highest institution in the country, would have the administrative capacity to manage independently the requirements of the same institution so that it can fulfil its constitutional functions. In other words, Parliament should have the power to prepare its financial estimates and to manage its own resources unhindered, independently and in a distinct manner from any type of influence from the Executive.

Parliament can never be free and unshackled unless it is no longer considered administratively as a government department. Parliamentary authority and autonomy, though different, are intrinsically linked to each other. To achieve an active parliamentary democracy we should not be afraid of taking the next step towards an autonomous parliament.

We need to proceed from words to facts. It is my pleasure as President of the House of Representatives to note that today this principle is accepted by everyone, including both political groups within the Maltese Parliament. Prime Minister Joseph Muscat himself often declared that Government would like to see parliamentary autonomy actually come into effect. I understand that the Opposition is of the same opinion as after all it was the previous administration that published the white paper on parliamentary autonomy. Thus the next step is to put this general will into action so that we ensure that this right which is missing today in the Maltese Parliament finally begins to form part of a series of rights which, as a Maltese people, we have achieved throughout the years since the 7th of June 1919. It is also necessary that this step is taken within the shortest time possible as I believe that everyone has had enough of hearing about the need of Parliament autonomy from the Speakers Emeriti, to whom I pay tribute today on this occasion. Please, allow me to quote a section from the ending of the speech of Speaker Emeritus Michael Frendo when he recently addressed the President’s Forum:

“Our democracy is a living democracy which has grown and still continues to grow. Only a strong Parliament is proof of a mature democracy. This should be our aim.”.

An important step, if not the most important, is the broad discussion that is taking place

regarding the new parliament building at the entrance of the capital city Valletta. It was my great pleasure when the Prime Minister delegated me, in agreement with the Opposition, to lead an open consultation process regarding this building. I have actually started this process and in fact a number of meetings have taken place which should lead to a sound decision in the interest of the Maltese and Gozitan population.

The same reasoning applies to the discussion regarding our country's Constitution, whether it should evolve or not – as in fact there appears the need that it should - and regarding the possibility or not of a Second Republic. I believe that this is also a process that needs the participation – indeed the direction – of the Parliament without prejudice to the broad participation of the Maltese and Gozitan public. For, how can we speak of a Constitution without involving the same Parliament which has to legislate?! Isn't that the way in which our country has progressed throughout the years, by sounding the voice of our people and ours who represent it? As for the meaning of a living democracy, the famous Constitutional author Sir William Ivor Jennings says thus in his book "Parliament":

"Si antiquitatem spectes, est vetustissima, si dignitatem, est honoratissima, si jurisdictionem, est capacissima."

In other words, the highest institution should be able to decide, and be responsible alone for, what is expected from a parliamentary democracy.

There is no denying that we have come a long way. I will keep working on what those before me have worked for to continuously elevate, as appropriate, this institution – Parliament.

- After the publication of the rulings given by the Chair between 1921 and 1924 by Professor Ray Mangion, in the coming months we will see the publication of other rulings given the Presidents of the House since 1924. I will endeavour to see that all these rulings are published as soon as possible.

- After the introduction of audio live streaming of the House and the Committee sessions, and after the launch of the video live streaming of the Committee meetings in the last months of the previous legislation, we will now be improving substantially the quality of the broadcasting of the Committee meetings through this important medium. Moreover, preparations are also in place so that, if necessary, the debates during the plenary sessions of the Parliament are also transmitted from the new Parliament building. This is another step by which Parliament can be more accessible to the people.

- As soon as I assumed this post I expressed my wish for Parliament to have its own magazine. I am pleased to announce that this wish has materialised in the form of a periodical which will be published every four months. We also plan to make this magazine available online on the Maltese Parliament website in both official languages, in order to increase awareness and appreciation for the work carried out in Parliament among the Maltese people, the members of parliament themselves and foreign parliamentary institutions.

- We have also published the Standing Orders of the House as amended from 1995 until the present day. It was a great honour for me to hand out a copy of this publication to a considerable number of new members of parliament during a meeting which was purposely held for them to understand how the House functions.

- By request of the same members, we have also published a useful information booklet about the Maltese Parliament and about all the members involved within.

As I am speaking about the new members I want to emphasise the fact that for the first time in the history of Parliament, we have ten female members. This augurs well for the political evolution of our country.

All these initiatives are aimed so that this Parliament is in a position to work better but, more importantly, to get closer to the people. In the coming weeks and months, after the necessary consultations, I will be launching other initiatives in order to strengthen the communication and interaction between Parliament and the people in general. As I said in my first speech on the 6th of April, after I took the oath as Speaker of the House, I would like this institution to be closer to the people and therefore I hope that by virtue of this series of initiatives, Parliament will approach the people and the people will be free to approach Parliament without any difficulty.

Another positive step towards a Parliament that is closer to the citizen is that already indicated by the present Government in its electoral programme, that “as an entity, MEUSAC... falls under Parliament, so that more resources will be available for the House of Representatives to screen EU directives and regulations, and to integrate better feedback from civil society in decisions of the Maltese Government.”. This is a solid step in the direction towards parliamentary autonomy.

On the same level we should explore ways of increasing dialogue between the MCESD and Parliament.

As I mentioned in the meeting which I had with the members elected to Parliament for the first time, I believe that every time I lead a delegation abroad I should possibly be accompanied by new members from each side of the House so that they can gain international experience on issues of national interest. This is exactly what I will be doing later on this month when I will be leading a delegation specialising in issues that concern small countries and environmental and economic difficulties. I think that this should continue so that everyone has the opportunity to increase their experience in the interest of a parliamentary democracy that is truly alive.

With the coming into force of the Treaty of Lisbon towards the end of 2009, the national parliaments were given stronger roles and powers than those under the previous Treaties. The strengthening of the roles of national parliaments, together with the European Parliament, is again evident in the Treaty regarding Stability, Coordination and Governance which has come into force precisely on the 1st of January of this year. Article 13 of this Treaty provides for the establishment of a new inter-parliamentary conference aimed at

discussing the budgetary policy lines and other issues under this Treaty. I am pleased to say that during the European Speakers Conference held in Cyprus last April, which was my first official commitment abroad and in which I was one of the four keynote speakers, we discussed and agreed upon the establishment of this new Conference which should be meeting for the first time during the Lithuanian Presidency, in the second semester of this year. It was precisely on the same day that the Maltese Parliament unanimously established the Standing Committee on Economic and Financial Affairs, which among its tasks will have the application of this same Treaty and therefore will be instrumental in the contribution of the Maltese Parliament to this Conference.

Needless to say the time has come for our parliamentary system to have an ethics committee or some other structure which establishes standards to be followed by the members of parliament. What I said in my speech of 6th April 2013, when I spoke about the role of Parliament in scrutinising the executive, applies here, and I quote:

“The people consider this a right, but a right that is complemented, and should be complemented, with the remedies that one expects from the country’s highest institution.”.

Thus we need to explore and discover the best model for achieving a balance concerning the correct behaviour of a member of parliament with regard to every citizen, consisting in the obligations and the remedies required.

In this manner we would be sending a clear signal that parliamentary political life rises above any unfair criticism, and thus we encourage more people to contribute towards strengthening democracy in our country.

Parliament should ensure that the remedies given by the Maltese tribunals and courts to citizens who have suffered some form of injustice due to any wrongdoing by the Executive, are respected. This is necessary so that the credibility of the country’s highest institution is further enhanced and rises above any wrongdoing.

In this context, what the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Simon Busuttil said recently in Parliament when he spoke about the establishment of a Petitions Committee, is relevant. With this proposal the Parliament would be establishing broader procedures so that public requests are not only heard but also treated within the highest institution of our country.

I am saying this because I believe that this institution can never rest on its laurels. We have to keep thinking in the same way as our predecessors, that the Maltese Parliament has to be a true reflection of the people’s will and a beacon of democracy. There is a lot of work to be done but we can manage as long as we all believe in our capabilities as a people who embrace the principles of solidarity and as a member state of the European Union.

On this national day cherished by the Maltese and Gozitan people, as President of the House of Representative, I sincerely pay tribute to all those who along the years felt a deep passion for politics and believed in contributing to the wellbeing of our country. Thanks to individuals like these, our nation has proven itself capable time and time again of deciding the best way forward in crucial moments. This sincere political commitment should fill us

with courage.

The memory of the martyrs of Sette Giugno is a reflection of our present and future efforts to further strengthen our Malta, this mother who gave us her name and whose children we all are.