



Press Release

PR 170157

25.01.2017

PRESS RELEASE ISSUED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Opening of the Meeting of Chairpersons of COSAC and the priorities of the Maltese Presidency of the Council

On Monday 23 January 2017, Chairman of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives Luciano Busuttil presided over the Meeting of Chairpersons of COSAC organised within the framework of the parliamentary dimension of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives Anglu Farrugia opened the meeting by welcoming the delegates to this first inter-parliamentary meeting of the Maltese Presidency. In his address he emphasised Malta's strategic position in the Mediterranean which has been transformed from being not only a stopover along major trade routes in the Mediterranean, but also a key promoter of regional cooperation and development. He remarked that Europe finds itself at a critical juncture with regard to its survival. He also added that COSAC provides the appropriate platform for parliamentarians to engage in fruitful and sustained discussions and emphasised the need to facilitate and promote parliamentary diplomacy so as to ensure that the exchange of ideas and conclusions, agreed during the plenary session, resonates beyond, in the spheres of national policies and European action plans. Speaker Farrugia concluded by calling on the parliamentarians to promote dialogue, unity and peace across all levels of the social sphere and to envision a shared, serene and prosperous future for all.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Affairs and Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto Louis Grech opened the first session of the meeting dealing with the priorities of the Maltese Presidency of the Council. In his address Louis Grech reiterated that the Maltese Presidency comes at a time when the European Union is in a state of flux and uncertainty. Mass migration movements, security concerns, economic strife, income inequalities, citizen disillusionment, terrorist attacks, and Brexit have created uncertainties and fears. Louis Grech said that these phenomena have contributed to the re-emergence of extreme nationalism, protectionism, xenophobia and geo-political tensions. These, he said, contrast sharply with the EU's ideals and carry the risk of derailing the European project.

The European Union will have to adapt to reflect various emerging realities, said Louis Grech. At this delicate time, the Union must focus on the issues that address the legitimate concerns and expectations of its citizens, he continued saying; he also said that the Union will succeed if it manages to instil a sense of hope and optimism, and if it makes citizens feel that they are getting added value from belonging to a great Union of nations that works in unison to enrich their lives.

Attachments: photos

Page: 1 of 2

The Deputy Prime Minister said that the theme of “rEUnion”, adopted for the Maltese Presidency, has at its core the long-term sustainability of the Union and restoring belief in the European project. He concluded that, with the right leadership, sense of vision and in-built flexibility, the Union will adapt to forge a strong dynamic and vibrant Europe for its young people and future generations. He expressed confidence that they will look back on this time as a watershed moment when European leaders recognised what was at stake and rose to the occasion.

Minister for Tourism Edward Zammit Lewis also addressed the delegates on the theme of Malta’s priorities for the Presidency of the Council by stressing the potentiality that the EU has conveyed to all the Member States in the form of transformational changes, by both delivering and harbouring peace, security, and prosperity for its citizens. He added that the Union has been facing major issues when it comes to migration. Furthermore, he noted that “we have been facing issues of security linked to terrorism while; in the meantime, the matter of Brexit has also emerged. This new face of the EU is generating widespread uncertainty, fear and potential inequalities amongst all European citizens”.

Whilst presenting the way forward that is aligned with the Maltese Presidency’s priorities, the Minister emphasised the Single Market, which is a pertinent socio-economic issue in today’s EU arena. “The Maltese Presidency intends to evaluate Single Market legislation with a sharper focus on the digital dimension, competitiveness and on SMEs, and expects to further contribute to the Digital Single Market Strategy.”

Another priority of the Maltese Presidency is ensuring the security of European citizens by contributing towards concrete action to address current regional and global challenges. Continuing action on combating terrorism must remain a priority and must be addressed from different policy aspects, noted the Minister. The Minister for Tourism also remarked that social inclusion is at the core of the Maltese Presidency. While noting that links between the individual national parliaments should be strengthened, the Minister expressed his appreciation towards the creation of the yellow card procedure under the Lisbon Treaty.

During his concluding remarks, Minister Zammit Lewis stated that COSAC provides the perfect platform for the Union to ensure its potential is exploited to the full.

The Chairpersons participating in the meeting raised a number of questions, with the topics of migration and the developments following the UK referendum being among the most prominent. Members present questioned how the Maltese Presidency intends to address migration and reduce irregular crossings. Malta was highly praised for the priorities identified, especially with regard to maritime affairs and the digital economy.

Minister Zammit Lewis reiterated that national parliaments are key protagonists. Nevertheless, there should be increased efforts to ensure that solidarity and trust between different parliaments is developed and strengthened further. Concluding, Minister Zammit Lewis highlighted the need to be mindful of the challenges faced by neighbouring states and the need to promote stabilisation through greater European engagement.