



3 ta' Mejju 2013

### L-Onor. Christopher Fearne

President tal-Kumitat dwar l-Affarijiet Barranin u Ewropej

Bhala l-ewwel impenn interparlamentari mill-hatra tiegħi bhala *Speaker* tal-Kamra tad-Deputati, Parlament ta' Malta, jiena pparteċipajt fil-Konferenza tal-*iSpeakers* tal-parlamenti nazzjonali tas-27 Stat Membru tal-Unjoni Ewropea u tal-Parlament Ewropew, li nżammet għewwa Nikosija, Ċipru, bejn il-21 u t-23 ta' April 2013.

Fost is-sugġetti fuq l-aġenda tal-Konferenza kien hemm:

- a) ir-rwol tal-parlamenti nazzjonali u tal-Parlament Ewropew fit-tishih tad-demokrazija f'pajjiżi terzi, b'mod partikolari fir-reġjun Mediterranju;
- b) kif l-Unjoni Ewropea tista' tkun dejjem aktar qrib iċ-ċittadini; u
- c) l-koeżjoni soċjali fi żminijiet ta' awsterità.

Minbarra dawn is-sessjonijiet formali kien hemm ukoll sessjoni informali bejn l-*iSpeakers* fejn iddiskutejna t-twaqqif ta' konferenza interparlamentari għdida li tittratta materji baġetarji u materji oħra konnessi mat-Trattat dwar l-Istabbiltà, Koordinazzjoni u Governanza, kif provdut f'Artiklu 13 tal-istess Trattat. Minkejja li l-Parlament Malti għadu ma rratifikax it-Trattat dwar l-Istabbiltà, Koordinazzjoni u Governanza, magħruf ukoll bhala l-Patt Fiskali, jiena hassejt li kelli nintervjeni fid-diskussjoni, ghax nemmen li t-twaqqif ta' tali konferenza iwassal sabiex jiġi indirizzat id-defiċit demokratiku li spiss jinhass b'riżultat ta' deċiżjonijiet li qegħdin jittieħdu mill-gvernijiet fuq livell Ewropew li finalment iridu jiġu implimentati fl-Istati Membri.

Fl-intervent tiegħi, jiena enfasizzajt propju dan il-punt, jiġifieri illi din il-Konferenza interparlamentari għandha titwaqqaf bla dewmien, u jekk jista' jkun b'mod li tinzamm il-laqgħa inawgurati tagħha matul il-Presidenza Litwana. Barra minn hekk, jien shaqt illi l-Konferenza għandha tkun miftuha għar-rappreżentanti mill-Istati Membri kollha, jiġifieri



dawk li qeghdin fiż-żona Ewro u dawk li mhumiex, kif ukoll li jkunu jinkludu dawk il-pajjiżi (bhall-Ingilterra u r-Repubblika Ċeka) illi ma ffirmawx it-Trattat dwar l-Istabbiltà, Koordinazzjoni u Governanza.

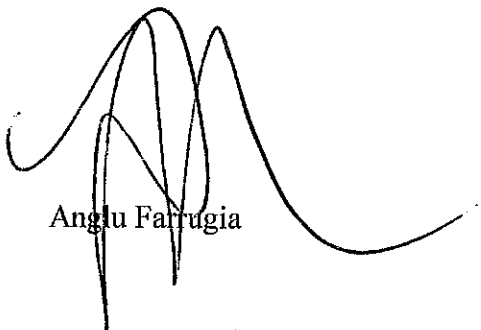
PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

Ma' din l-ittra qiegħed ngħaddilek kopja tal-Konklużjonijiet tal-Konferenza, fejn hemm id-dettalji ta' dak li ġie maqbul ġewwa Ċipru. Qed ngħaddilek ukoll kopja tad-diskors tiegħi fil-ftuħ tal-Konferenza f'Ċipru, meta ntlabt nitkellem flimkien mal-*Speaker* Ċiprijott fil-bidu tal-Ewwel Sessjoni dwar ir-rwol tal-parlamenti nazzjonali u tal-Parlament Ewropew fit-tishih tad-demokrazija fil-pajjiżi terzi, b'enfasi speċjali fuq ir-regjun tal-Mediterran.

Inhoss illi l-Kumitat li inti tippresjedi għandu jiehu nota ta' dawn il-konklużjonijiet, b'mod partikolari ta' dak li għandu x'jaqsam mal-konferenza interparlamentari l-ġdida dwar materji baġetarji, anke għaliex jekk dawn ikunu attwati fil-presidenza Litwana, il-Parlament Malti ser ikun mistieden jippartecipa fil-konferenza l-ġdida.

Qed ninforma wkoll lill-Onor. Silvio Schembri, President tal-Kumitat dwar l-Affarijiet Ekonomiċi u Finanzjarji, bl-eżitu tal-laqgħa ġewwa Nikosija peress li din il-materja għandha rilevanza diretta għall-kompetenzi tal-Kumitat li huwa jippresjedi.

Dejjem tiegħek



Angelo Farrugia

**Presidency Conclusions  
of the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments,  
Nicosia 21-23 April 2013**

**Preliminary remarks:**

The Conference of the Speakers of the Parliaments of the European Union (EU) was held in Nicosia between 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2013, upon the invitation of the President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus. The Speakers of 42 Houses of the 27 Member States of the European Union (or their representatives), as well as the President of the European Parliament, attended the Conference. The Conference was also attended by the Speakers of Croatia (acceding country) and three candidate countries -Iceland, Montenegro and FYROM. The Conference was chaired by Mr. Yiannakis, L. Omirou, President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus.

On Monday, 22 April 2013, the Conference discussed the following topics:

1. “The role of EU national Parliaments and the European Parliament in enhancing democracy and human rights in third countries, emphasizing on the Mediterranean region”; the topic was jointly introduced by Mr. Yiannakis L. Omirou and Dr. Angelo Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta.
2. “Bringing citizens closer to the European Union”; the topic was jointly introduced by Mr. Andre Flahaut, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Belgium and Mrs. Antigoni Papadopoulou, MEP, Member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and Rapporteur for the European Year of Citizens 2013.
3. “Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Government in the Economic and Monetary Union” was discussed during the “one plus one” session held within the framework of the Conference.

On Tuesday 23 April 2013, the Conference discussed the topic “Social cohesion in times of austerity – what can national Parliaments do.”; the topic was jointly introduced by Mr. Evangelos Meimarakis, President of the Hellenic Parliament and Ms. Assunção Esteves, President of the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal.

*With regard to the topic "The role of EU national Parliaments and the European Parliament in enhancing democracy and human rights in third countries, emphasizing on the Mediterranean region".*

1. The Speakers note that the presence of the European Union in the world stage has acquired increasing significance. They welcome the fact that the European Union is an important international power, with enhanced bilateral relations with countries around the globe, as well as multilateral relations with international organizations, in which it plays an active role. They further underline that, as stipulated by the Treaty of Lisbon, its international action should be guided by the principles of democracy, the rule of law, universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.
2. The Speakers underline the strong interest of the European Union and its Member States towards the Mediterranean region and welcome the important developments towards transition achieved within the past 2 years. The Speakers express, however, their concern about the continuous bloodshed in Syria and the turmoil in Egypt.
3. The Speakers stress the importance of democracy and human rights consolidation in the Mediterranean region, as a tool for long lasting peace, stability and security, as well as development and prosperity for citizens of the region.
4. The Speakers also emphasise that, when functioning in an effective and efficient manner, Parliaments can play an important role in helping build democratic systems and good governance, while they can also prove to be important agents of stability in cases of transition. Well-functioning Parliaments can provide the conditions for proper democratic systems and are therefore a central institution of democracy. This is why Parliaments in the Arab Spring countries should be supported.
5. In this respect, the Speakers recognise the role of Parliaments of the European Union in enhancing democracy and human rights in third countries. They stress that peer to peer partnership and assistance could help towards establishing well-functioning Parliaments, the characteristics of which should be mutual and reciprocal respect, equal and effective representation, transparency, accountability and effectiveness at both national and international level.

6. The Speakers acknowledge that the Parliaments' expertise in all aspects of parliamentary life can contribute substantially to capacity building in third countries, which would in turn bring about stable democracy.

7. The Speakers encourage national Parliaments and the European Parliament to pursue their activities in this domain, including technical assistance, exchange and twinning programmes, the support of human rights and democracy defenders and the adoption of pertinent resolutions and ratification of treaties and conventions. They underline that any assistance provided needs to be carried out in a spirit of mutual respect, with joint elaborations of projects, so as to ensure a truly effective cooperation.

8. Noting the existence of a range of related programmes conducted at both bilateral and multilateral level, the Speakers underline that caution should be used to avoid overlap and duplication, while synergy between different initiatives should be ensured.

**With regard to the topic "Bringing citizens closer to the European Union":**

1. The Speakers agree that the ongoing economic and financial crisis in the European Union underlines the need for accountability, strong democratic legitimacy in EU decision making and further strengthening of the participation of the citizens in the public affairs of the Union. Since national Parliaments and the European Parliament represent the will of the people, the Speakers reiterate the Parliaments' crucial role in reducing the democratic deficit in the Union.

2. In respect of the above, the Speakers agree that Parliaments should act as facilitators of debates on EU matters, both at the national level and at an interparliamentary level. To this end, and notwithstanding the initiation of any debate on an EU topic at the national level, interparliamentary cooperation should, *inter alia*, include the exchange of information on providing further impetus to raising awareness among the citizens on their rights and on EU topics.

3. The Speakers welcome the designation of 2013 as the "European Year of Citizens", and regard the said designation as a timely opportunity to further encourage active participation of the citizens in the democratic life of the Union.

4. The Speakers underline the great importance of the citizens' strong participation in the elections for Members of the European Parliament, as it further develops the citizens' sense of belonging to the Union, thus minimising the gap between the Union and its people. Therefore, the Speakers encourage the citizens to exercise their electoral rights and stress the need to ensure that the relevance of the decisions taken at the national and the EU level, as well as the impact on their lives is abundantly clear to the citizens.

5. The Speakers reiterate the key role of the media in parliamentary democracy, as it was firmly expressed in the Conclusions of the Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments convened in Warsaw on 19-21 April 2012, and suggest that Parliaments should commit themselves in making the best possible use of audiovisual means and social networking, in an effort to maximise the exchange of information between the Parliaments and the citizens, thereby strengthening their active participation in EU public affairs.

**With regard to the topic "Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (TSCG)":**

1. The Speakers note that the democratic legitimacy of the European Semester process is of vital importance and that the national Parliaments should be adequately involved in shaping and implementing the framework for stronger economic, budgetary and fiscal policy reforms in their countries and in bringing the EU dimension into national politics.

2. The Speakers emphasise that the strengthening of democratic legitimacy within the EU is needed especially now, where the discussion on the causes of the crisis, particularly in the Eurozone, focuses on adequate EU economic governance structures.

3. The Speakers stress the necessity for stronger democratic legitimacy and accountability in the economic governance of the EU, particularly in the EMU, and the need for a greater role for national Parliaments. They welcome the acknowledgement of this necessity in both the "Blueprint for a deep and genuine economic and monetary Union", published by the European Commission in November 2012 and the report entitled "Towards a genuine economic and monetary union", published by the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, in December 2012, in close collaboration with the Presidents of the European Commission, the Eurogroup and the European Central Bank.

4. The Speakers agree that the deeper integration of the EU should be accompanied by the strengthening of democratic legitimacy and accountability both at the European and national level, at which decisions are taken.

5. The Speakers note that the cooperation between the European and national Parliaments should be intensified in the context of the new economic governance of the EMU, building on the Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (TSCG). They also note that the establishment of an inter-parliamentary Conference based on this Article offers national Parliaments a unique challenge to consider their role in ensuring democratic accountability and legitimacy in the EU, in the context of a more integrated financial, budgetary and economic policy framework.

6. The Speakers agree that the future of national Parliaments depends largely upon how proactively they will use the new opportunities available, so that EU national Parliaments and the European Parliament contribute towards making the EU system of economic governance more legitimate and democratically accountable.

7. The Speakers consider that the deepened economic union requires further parliamentary oversight and to this extent supports the establishment of a Conference, in line with Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union. The Speakers note that according to a previous decision of EU Speakers<sup>1</sup> it is important to develop established structures to meet future needs of parliamentary cooperation.

8. The Speakers agree that the Conference should consist of representatives from all the National Parliaments of Member countries of the European Union and the European Parliament, in particular from relevant committees. To this end, they consider that the new mechanism could be built upon the formula of the Conference on CFSP and CSDP, replacing the meetings of the Chairpersons of relevant Committees, organised by each Presidency, thus rendering it cost-effective. The composition and size of each delegation rests upon each Parliament.

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<sup>1</sup> EU Speakers Conference, Stockholm, 14-15 May 2010.

"...the Speakers consider that improved coordination of interparliamentary activities within the EU is important. The Speakers stress the importance of developing established structures to meet future needs in interparliamentary cooperation. Overlapping meetings or debates should be avoided".

9. The Speakers propose that the Conference shall meet twice a year and be coordinated with the European Semester cycle. In the first semester of each year, the Conference shall be held in Brussels and will be co-hosted and co-chaired over by the European Parliament and the Parliament of the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, while in the second semester, the Conference shall be held in, and chaired over by the country holding the six-monthly Council Presidency. The Speakers propose that the first Conference be held during the Lithuanian Presidency and the second in the beginning of 2014, at the European Parliament.

10. The hosting Parliaments shall be responsible for providing the secretariat. The secretariat of the European Parliament and their co-hosts and the hosting Parliament of the second yearly conference should stay in contact to ensure the continuity of the works.

11. The Conference of Speakers recommends conducting a review of these arrangements for the Conference and that the relevant Presidency submit the conclusions of the said review to the Conference of Speakers of European Union Parliaments, in 2015.

**With regard to the topic "Social cohesion in times of austerity-what can national Parliaments do":**

1. The Speakers agree that Parliaments of the European Union should be closely involved in shaping and implementing the framework for stronger economic and social reforms at the national level. They also recognise that European Semester process, introduced through the "Six Pack" legislation, is a tool to improve EU policy coordination both on macroeconomic and structural issues.

2. The Speakers underline that Parliaments of the European Union have to ensure that the implementation of the European Semester is conducted in a democratic and transparent way and embodied with democratic accountability. They also agree that the democratic legitimacy of the European Semester can only be achieved through the direct involvement of national Parliaments in all stages of the process.

3. The Speakers emphasise that Parliaments of the European Union should be involved in the discussion of the Stability or Convergence Programmes and National Reform Programmes of their country before they are submitted to the European Commission. They also highlight the need that the European Commission in implementing these programmes, should take into account the specific recommendations of each country. National Parliaments should also be



informed on the draft of the specific recommendations of their country and send their opinion to the national Governments. During the debates on national budgets, the Parliaments have to evaluate if the specific recommendations of their country have been fully considered, and appropriately reflected in the national budgets.

4. The Speakers agree that strict austerity measures alone cannot solve the problems faced by the EU and its member states, without achieving balance among fiscal consolidation, sustainable growth and social cohesion.

5. The Speakers also underline the paramount importance of effective solidarity among EU member states, particularly in conditions of economic crisis.

6. The Speakers stress the importance of the democratic control and accountability that should occur at the level on which the decisions are taken and implemented, including decisions by the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund). The Lisbon Treaty has enhanced the democratic accountability of both the European Parliament and national Parliaments.

7. The Speakers note that further strengthening of the EMU, has to be accompanied by the proportionate involvement of the European Parliament and national Parliaments. They also stress that cooperation between the European Parliament and national Parliaments should be further enhanced, building on Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (TSCG) and Protocol 1 of the Treaty of Functioning of the European Union. They also emphasise that the European Parliamentary Week on the European Semester for Economic Policy Coordination and the Political Dialogue with the European Commission contribute towards the achievement of this goal.

8. The Speakers also underline the importance of the discussions of the Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments, hosted by the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus, which aim to add to the active involvement of the national Parliaments, in the shaping of economic and social policies. The implementation of balanced and socially sensitive policies is particularly important, in the midst of the financial crisis which has gravely affected the living standards of European citizens.

**With regard to IPEX (Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange):**

1. The Speakers welcome the conclusions of the Meeting of the Secretaries General of national Parliaments of EU Member States and of the European Parliament held in Nicosia on 10-11 February 2013 concerning the further implementation of the IPEX Action Plan adopted in Warsaw in 2012.

2. The Speakers take note of the determination of the Secretaries General to further develop IPEX as a reliable tool for the exchange of EU information and documents and expressed their support to their efforts to strengthen the role of the IPEX national Correspondents in the performance of their tasks and duties as described in the paper "Description of tasks and duties of the IPEX national Correspondent". Furthermore, the Speakers endorsed the proposal that IPEX should host documents for further interparliamentary conferences alongside the existing webpage for the Conference of Speakers (paragraph 7 of the conclusions on IPEX).

3. The Presidency was requested to contact the European Commission with the proposal that documents which the Commission currently transmits only to the Council should also be transmitted to IPEX (paragraph 9 of the conclusions on IPEX).

23/4/2013



PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

**CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF EUROPEAN UNION PARLIAMENTS  
Nicosia, Republic of Cyprus – 21 to 23 April 2013**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

by the

**Hon Angelo Farrugia MP  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Parliament of Malta**

*The role of EU national parliaments and the European Parliament  
in enhancing democracy and human rights in third countries,  
emphasizing on the Mediterranean region*

**Session One – 21 April 2013**

Mr President  
Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me start by thanking our kind hosts, the House of Representatives of Cyprus, for organizing this prestigious event that has just been launched, and in particular, my colleague Yiannakis Omirou, for giving me the opportunity to address you at this first session of the Conference of Speakers of European Union Parliaments, being held on this charming island of the Mediterranean. It is indeed a privilege as much as a happy occasion to be working alongside you during these two days in what is in effect my very first official commitment abroad since being elected Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta, just over fifteen days ago.

Excellencies  
Dear colleagues

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which we are all members of, strikingly defines democracy as a *'universally recognized ideal and goal that seeks to preserve and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual, to achieve social justice and to build sustainable development. Democracy is also a mode of government that is founded on the right of everyone to take part in the management of public affairs. It is premised on equality between men and women and on their full participation in society.'*

Ladies and Gentlemen

Rightly had the twentieth century Nobel Prize laureate T S Eliot written:

*"What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from."*

History repeats itself with astonishing consistency. Since time immemorial, systems of bad governance have spawned disgruntled citizens at all levels of society. Some societies astutely went through the motions of silent rebellion; others rose vehemently against their oppressors. Some achieved, others failed. Successive decades and centuries have witnessed first hand the innumerable adversities released from the fabled box that an inquisitive Pandora had at one time opened.

Looking closely around us, we observe:

- The collapse of failed states
- Internecine conflicts and civil strife
- The trampling over of fundamental human rights
- The discomfiting ill-treatment of women
- The scourge of human trafficking and the tragic outflows of irregular migration, compounding problems for transit and destination countries
- The increasing economic and social disparity between North and South
- An ever-vociferous incompatibility between religious traditions and secular statehood
- Meaningless democracy, injustice, the absence of the rule of law and the lack of freedom of expression
- The rising spectre of terrorist activities
- The worrying proliferation of all types of weapons
- Atrocious environmental degradation

Are we here talking about some popular documentary on the *'History Channel'*? Far from it, dear listeners.

Early in 2011, history took a dramatic turn in the Mediterranean. The course of events across the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, when the gunpowder keg that was the Arab Spring blew up in the world's face, created a conflagration that blazed voraciously throughout North Africa and the Middle East. The flames of those violent events carried with them,

around and afar, the desperate cry for freedom and democracy, which had been kept bridled by affected populations for decades. In the aftermath to those acrimonious happenings, the geopolitical landscape of the Mediterranean became significantly changed.

The Southern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries do not represent a homogenous group. They are intrinsically disparate internally as much as they are diverse from each other. To a limited extent, they also differ sub-regionally. The driving forces that fuelled the Arab Spring were not exclusively the demands for political freedom: popular frustration with soaring unemployment, with economic stagnation and poverty, with rampant corruption and authoritarian elites dangerously accelerated the revolution's impetus.

In all honesty, have the popular uprisings raked away for good the age-old concerns in these countries?

The task confronting any interested observer is indeed daunting:

- parliaments, the executive and the judiciary that need to be strengthened, in some instances established anew;
- effective, accountable and democratic institutions that must be set up and maintained;
- good governance and the rule of law that have to be introduced and applied;
- civil society organizations, free trade unions and NGOs that have to be promoted and advocated;
- pluralistic and independent media and the freedom of expression that need to be instilled and nurtured;
- security forces that have to be democratically controlled and overseen;
- human rights that must be modernized and moderated.

What is even more disturbing is that this list is without any visible end.

Very few foresaw that the region would erupt the way it did two years ago, leading us to think that inter-regional dialogue was acutely missing, and that crossed relationships existed between the Mediterranean (North Africa and the Middle East) on the one hand, and Europe and the rest of the world on the other. A healthy, consistent and genuine dialogue was absent on various levels: political, economic and commercial, parliamentary, multilateral, at the grassroots and among members of civil society.

Though apparently herculean, the exercise that awaits us is yet doable, provided that we embark on our mission with a rigid determination to improve and to reform.

At the conclusion of the EU-League of Arab States' Foreign Ministerial Meeting held in Malta in February 2008, Ministers had reaffirmed their commitment to peace and to the respect of democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms, in a spirit of dialogue *'guided by the principle of mutual respect.'*

Moreover, the Council's conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations, adopted in its meeting of the 17 November 2009, had underlined, amongst other points, that:

- *"Political dialogue is an important way in which to further development objectives and other external relations objectives. In the framework of the political dialogue, respect for democratic governance, human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law should be regularly assessed with a view to forming a shared understanding and identifying supporting measures. This dialogue has an important preventive dimension and aims to ensure that these principles are upheld.*

- *A holistic approach on governance entails mainstreaming of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic governance and rule of law to all policy sectors, amongst others, by implementing the EU guidelines for human rights dialogues, and by including human rights, democracy and the rule of law in discussions with third countries, in programming discussions and in country strategy papers.*”

### Distinguished colleagues

Let me pause to recall what Akshat Rathi, an organic chemist, wrote in a scientific magazine last month:

*“Some time in humanity’s past, a small group of Homo Sapiens migrated out of Africa before spreading out to every possible corner of the Earth. All the women of that group carried DNA inherited from just one woman, commonly known as the mitochondrial Eve, whose DNA was [in turn] inherited by all humans alive today.”*

Solidarity with our compatriots is thus an obligation that goes well beyond mere expressions of compassion. It should be also acknowledged with a genealogical mindset rather than from just a geological perspective.

Aspirations for fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law transcend cultural differences, whereas genetics still bind us together as human beings. We are obliged to offer our Mediterranean partners something more tangible than just aspirations.

Peace, security and stability in Europe and in the Mediterranean are intrinsically and inextricably interlinked. Democracy in the Arab world is also a cardinal factor for peace and security for the region, for Europe and thereby for the entire world. The



Middle East Peace Process is a good example of the multi-layered road to democracy that needs to be sought by the countries involved for their own people.

The road to reconciliation requires strong goodwill and a firm commitment by all actors in the conflict. The implosion of Syria, against a mangled backdrop of a fragile Iraq, an ever-belligerent Iran and an ever-enigmatic Afghanistan form an impressive array of problematic issues clustered in the same regional space. Economies which are based on social and ecological market-economy principles in the region certainly need to be propelled forward by regional cooperation.

### Excellencies

Let us not rashly drop down our guard, however, as we try to embark on tasks meaning to introduce democratic values. Quoting from an article titled "*Arab democracy and the return of the Mediterranean world*" by Robert D Kaplan in *The Washington Post* of 27 February 2011:

*"With the toppling of autocratic regimes ... some have euphorically announced the arrival of democracy in the Middle East. But something more subtle may develop. The regimes that emerge may call themselves democracies, and the world may go along with the lie, but the test of a system is how the power relationships work behind the scenes."*

And this is exactly what we should be vigilant for. In our energetic efforts to prop up democratic transitions in these countries that elicit our aid, as we harp on the need for a greater realization that '*more for more*' is the name of the game, we might, as Kaplan so eloquently put it, be obviously ushering in the spectre of situations that are as tempestuously irrational and displeasing to us as much as they are to the populations in those countries.

The UN Secretary General himself, in delivering his message on the occasion of the International Day of democracy on 15 September 2011, had ominously warned us all that “*democracy cannot be exported or imposed from abroad: it must be generated by the will of the people and nurtured by a strong and active civil society.*”

In spite of the fact that all countries in the Mediterranean and the Middle East are members of the United Nations, violations of human rights remain fairly common in the region. In particular, the position of women in public, political and family life in these countries remains worrisome. Although there is a process of rewriting constitutions, public comments on the future position of women is not encouraging in some countries in the area.

Moreover, we still face the continuous problem of illegal or irregular migration to our shores that brings with it several ancillary problems, including international protection of stateless persons. The EU Dublin III proposal thankfully provides for the adoption of a regulation to address such cases.

In the 5 + 5 Malta Summit on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October 2012, the Heads of State and of Government of the Member States of the Arab Maghreb Union and of the Western European Mediterranean countries expressed their commitment to engage in relations, processes and projects to build regional, inter-regional and intra-regional confidence.

- We should establish and maintain a pre-emptive dialogue, in a multi-disciplinary framework, to secure a wider understanding and a deeper sense of trust in this inter-regional context. Incidentally, I remember personally emphasizing, during a UN Conference on crime prevention held in Cairo in 1995, the possibility of a regional neighbourhood watch in the Mediterranean.

- Democratic reform cannot simply be penned. It must filter downwards, upwards and sideways.
- The people should never feel that they had substituted one dictator by another. The choice of a leader should not happen through foreign intervention, as democracies are of modular construction and never do they suddenly appear at the wave of a magic wand.
- We should stay away from trying to be invasive with pre-fabricated *prêt-à-porter* models of democracy which might not necessarily suit the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and there is no blue print for successful democratic transition processes.

Dear Colleagues  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Challenges can be converted into opportunities. The Mediterranean Sea is capable of proving itself once more that it can yet serve as a bridge between its northern and southern shores. It can become a place for peaceful and harmonious cohabitation, where different cultures and religions thrive and relish in their glorious pasts. The Mediterranean Sea can once again be the waterway that connects us rather than that which separates us in our common heritage and shared values.

The role that parliaments can play in assisting in the democratic transition processes can never be accentuated enough. Democratic parliaments reflect democratic societies. In the 'parliamentary hexagon', parliaments are vested with supreme powers to, amongst others, influence foreign policy and international relations, at times called the 'power of negotiation

and mediation'. This is parliamentary diplomacy veritably at its best.

The First Summit of Speakers of the parliaments of the Union for the Mediterranean, convening in Marseilles on 7 April 2013 – this conference incidentally took place on the morrow of my nomination as Speaker, making it physically impossible for me to participate in, to my deep regret – categorically declared that *“representative democracies with strong parliaments are best placed to respond to political and economic challenges ...”* The Final Declaration of that Summit called on the national parliaments of the EU Member States and the European Parliament *“to make support for the parliaments of countries in transition a priority, in order to lay the foundations for robust and effective parliamentary democracy in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries.”*

Democracy means nothing to most people if there is no food, no safety and no jobs to go round. The road to sound democratic principles is paved with an enthusiasm to educate, to train, to populate universities with students, young and old. Knowledge is power. It is the sustaining life-line for socio-economic, political and sustainable development of any country. Everybody agrees with that famous maxim which goes: *‘Give me the child, and I will mould the man.’*

The European Commission for Democracy through Law (popularly known as the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe) has 58 full members, including Algeria, Israel, Morocco and Tunisia. It boasts a pool of advisory and expert services which, in the view of the European Association of Former Members of Parliament of the Member States of the Council of Europe, as it met in Malta last November, *“should be given an official mandate as an offer to all the countries in the region, in order to support the drafting or revising of constitutions, constitutions that uphold universal human rights, the rule of law and principles of good governance.”*

As a Working Group on assistance to Parliaments of new and emerging democracies had held during a Conference of this same assembly in Copenhagen, going as far back as 2006, *'parliaments are the primary bearers of the highest democratic values, and underpin civil and political freedoms'*, and furthermore that *'cooperation between parliaments at different levels of development is therefore a fundamental means of encouraging democracy.'*

Regional parliamentary fora, such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) and the 5 + 5 Dialogue, have a crucial role to play. Parliamentarians in these groupings congregate not just to discuss issues of common interest, but, more importantly, to conceive and launch initiatives that make a difference to the lives of people, **in practice.**

Sitting parliamentarians champion the implantation of the proposals and the adequate financial funding of programmes and instruments favouring the transition to democracy. However, former parliamentarians may also take part in operations intended to establish collaboration between Europe and the Arab world in a revived spirit of genuine dialogue. This rich pool of accomplished former MPs is a permanent forum that can be tapped into and utilized effectively. With more time on their hands, politicians who have retired from active parliamentary life may be recycled back into the system where their knowledge and experience may be put to good use to support the work being done by standing MPs.

Democratic capacity building in northern Africa may be enhanced through a programme of cooperation between national parliaments of the neighbouring states of the EU and by the European Parliament, in an exercise aimed at placing it at the

service of those interested in setting up their own democratic and parliamentary structures.

Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki, addressing the European Parliament last February, stated that there is no turning back for Tunisia, now that the country is on the path of democracy and the rule of law. He added – and I willingly support him in this – that Tunisia wants to rely on Europe, particularly as this is the first time that the ideas and interests of both sides are converging.

In this regard, an interesting proposal was put forward by my predecessor in the Chair in Malta, during his official visit to Tunisia last year. Tunisian electoral commission officials and representative politicians were invited to train at how we run general elections in Malta. The training programme was intended to expose participants to the practicalities of the electoral process, laying particular emphasis on procedures against fraud and abuse, the fair regulation of broadcasting and political advertising during the electoral campaign, the freedom to campaign and policing and the maintenance of good order throughout.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

All is not lost. Curious Pandora had indeed opened up the beautiful container given to her by Zeus. However, as the myth goes, not all of the box's contents escaped irretrievably into space. One item – Elpis, a personification of the Spirit of Hope – remained inside. As the Greek poet Hesiod describes in his *Works and Days*:

*“Only Hope was left within her unbreakable house,  
she remained under the lip of the jar  
and did not fly away. Before [she could], Pandora replaced the  
lid of the jar.”*

I therefore end my presentation on this positive note. I strongly believe that there is still light at the end of the tunnel. It is up to all of us to come together, to be together and to work together to achieve those realistic goals that make possible our world and our region to be a better home for us all.

Thank you for your kind attention.