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# Press Release

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## **PRESS RELEASE BY THE OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER**

### ***Courtesy call on the Speaker by the participants of the seminar '2 WILL – To work for (European) Integration at Local (Government) Level'***

Speaker Anġlu Farrugia received in Parliament the participants of the seminar entitled '2 WILL – To work for (European) Integration at Local (Government) Level'. The participants represented Municipal Councils from 11 EU Member States. They were led by Noel Muscat, Mayor of Swieqi, the host of the seminar, and Pawel Kownacki, Mayor of Wieliszew, Poland, the current chairperson of this European initiative.

In his address, the Speaker acknowledged that people's trust in EU institutions has plummeted and that Euroscepticism has made inroads in European societies. Critics perceive EU institutions as unaccountable institutions; they drew comparisons with national democratically elected state institutions. They even raised the question of a democratic deficit within the decision-making structure of the EU. He added that European people were disconnected from the EU institutions in Brussels. They were unable to realise that local matters are intrinsically linked to European questions.

European people are also disillusioned as they look at EU institutions as imposing measures that may have contributed to a decline in the well-being of European societies, including high unemployment, notably amongst young workers. The controversial 2015 plan put forward by the European Commission led by President Jean Claude Juncker, introduced migrant quotas for EU member states. Notwithstanding the good intentions of that decision, it has since been construed by some EU member states as an imposition even though that decision was based on the fundamental principle of solidarity amongst people.

Populist movements are gaining ground in Europe as a result of Euroscepticism and fomenting nationalistic and inward looking sentiments. People may feel disillusioned as they have failed to reap the positive effects of EU accession. The inability of people to close the wealth gap with the prosperous EU member states, and the perceived political inequality on EU deliberations, are two other elements that may lead people to question whether it is time to reconsider EU membership, such as is the case with Brexit.

The Speaker called for a healthy, mature and objective political discussion wherein one takes due account of rhetoric in politics, propaganda and the source of the information. He called on European citizens to take ownership of the European project, even at local government level, underlining the principle of subsidiarity. He called on the EU to attach particular importance to policies aimed at reducing disparities amongst European regions, create opportunities for new businesses, social welfare, and promoting a better quality of life. The way forward to address Euroscepticism is through

the good use of Regional Cohesion Funds intended to achieve sustainable growth and help local communities in Europe better understand the benefits of solidarity amongst European people.

The meeting was also addressed Thomas Werthen, Municipality of Habo, Sweden, and Theodora Patsiavoudi, Municipality of Agia, Greece.