

KAMRA TAD-DEPUTATI



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

L-iSpeaker

The Speaker

**8th High level meeting of the Parliaments of the "5+5 Western
Mediterranean Dialogue" Member States**

Opening Address

by

**Honourable Dr Angelo Farrugia,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Parliament of Malta**

17 January 2019

Malta

**Hon. Pedro Roque, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean,
Honourable Members,**

Good morning,

Allow me to start by welcoming you all to Malta. It is indeed a great pleasure for me, as Speaker of the Maltese Parliament, to greet you in our newly built parliamentary building situated in the historically rich and culturally elegant capital city, Valletta. In collaboration with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, we focused this year's agenda on three separate yet inter-related challenges and opportunities present in our common Mediterranean region, namely: sustainable development, migration and youth. The focus on these topics aims to provide members of parliament with an updated picture of the region. Furthermore, it reaffirms the importance to recognize the pivotal role played by parliaments in the development of a more peaceful and prosperous region.

Colleagues,

Created in Rome on 10 December 1990, the Ministerial forum for the dialogue in the Western Mediterranean, known also as the 5+5 Dialogue has for the past two decades served as an excellent informal platform discussing a vast array of subjects and regional issues. What makes the 5+5 dialogue so unique is the fact that it brings together five countries from the Arab Maghreb Union; Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and five countries from the European Union; France, Malta, Portugal, Italy and Spain. During the Second Summit of the Heads of State and Government which took place in Malta on 5-6 October 2012, they agreed on the importance to add the parliamentary component and invited the National Parliaments of the countries of the Western Mediterranean to also launch a similar fruitful dialogue. This morning, we continue strengthening this vision and reaffirm the role of parliamentary work in the region.

Friends, we are here today to continue promoting the original aim of the 5+5 Dialogue, mainly: reinforcing and enriching the political, economic and cultural dialogue between countries of the Western Mediterranean. Furthermore, we reassert our shared, and long-standing belief that the Mediterranean is not a seabed of political turmoil, volatile environment and demographic instability, but is a rich mosaic of peoples, traditions and trades. It is unfortunate that we continue to witness the ongoing environmental depletion of our coasts and marine life, relatively high levels of youth unemployment and lack of a long-term socio-economic Mediterranean plan.

It is tragic that we continue to ignore the plights of hundreds of men, women and children escaping war, poverty and persecution. We can only imagine the psychological and physical trauma these migrants go through when being smuggled from one state to the other. Reports by the UN and other regional organisations abound with stories of human rights violations perpetrated by the smugglers and militias. Furthermore, migrants are in some instances caught in between smugglers, NGO rescue vessels and multiple interpretations of international humanitarian law

and obligations. I cannot speak about migration, without mentioning recent cases of political impasse expressed through tit-for-tats and futile *Twitter* messages between Governments. In the name of human decency, but also in view of our role to promote the well-being of humanity, we need to agree that the preservation of life takes precedence before any other political issues and delays to secure life go against the core principles of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. As Members of Parliament we must keep our Governments accountable and increase domestic and regional pressure to find a long-term human rights-based solution.

Colleagues

It is on this note that I continue to reaffirm the pivotal role of parliamentary diplomacy and the importance to keep similar fora active. As Members of Parliament we occupy a triple role, that is primarily as legislators, secondly as parliamentary diplomats and thirdly as interlocutors with the constituency. Our primary role, that of legislators is probably the most reported upon. We draft new legislative texts and emend existing ones to ensure that our respective body of laws is up to date and in tune with developments on the international arena. Our secondary role, namely that of parliamentary diplomacy, is given less prominence, yet it is equally important. Through the strengthening of relations across Parliaments and the establishment of long-lasting cooperation we create a strong network of partners. Lastly, we communicate regularly with our constituency and we exchange information and beliefs on ongoing issues and challenges. Issues related to the environment, the future of our youths and migration are frequently brought up. An honest and informed dialogue addressing false perceptions and stereotypical images is an important aspect of our political life. We need to be the balanced voice of reason, advocating for dialogue, mutual understanding and a deeper consideration of different environmental, social and economic challenges present in the region. We hold the key to merge our three roles into one strong voice and together promote a more sustainable, economically active and prosperous Mediterranean region.

Colleagues,

To conclude, I augur that the 8th high-level meeting of National Parliaments of the 5+5 Western Mediterranean Dialogue Member States is a fruitful one and, as a unique family we work in tandem to formulate a set of conclusions. As per normal practice, these will be submitted tomorrow to the attention and consideration of the Foreign Ministers attending the 5+5 Ministerial meeting.

I wish you all a nice stay in Malta.

Thank you