

KAMRA TAD-DEPUTATI



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

L-iSpeaker

The Speaker

Speech by

Hon. Angelo Farrugia

Speaker of the House of Representatives

at the

6th Summit of Speakers of the PA-UfM

13 February 2019

President Tajani

Esteemed colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to join previous Speakers to express my gratitude and that of my delegation to the European Parliament for hosting such an important Summit and for the hospitality given to all participants.

It is indeed a great pleasure to be present here today for our sixth Summit of Presidents of the Parliamentary Dimension of the Union for the Mediterranean. Throughout the years, the Summit of Speakers established itself as an important yearly gathering for the Presidents of European and Mediterranean Parliaments. The identification and discussion of key challenges and opportunities currently affecting our shared Euro-Mediterranean region creates a strong and durable network of equal partners.

This year's topic **migration and the status of refugees in the Mediterranean** is crucial, if not pivotal for any other discussions related to the Mediterranean. The current migration crisis is not the result of a sudden catastrophe but the consequence of prolonged conflict and military activity, environmental depletion, political persecution and socio-economic injustice.

As Presidents of our respective Parliaments meeting yearly for the Speaker's Summit of the Union for the Mediterranean, we have frequently agreed that good quality employment, inclusive growth for all, sustainable development and strong democratic institutions form the basis of resilient and sustainable societies. Furthermore, we frequently underlined that migration is not an abstract legal concept or lump of statistical data, but it rather represents the hopes and aspirations of men, women and children.

I am therefore pleased to share with you Malta's work and commitment to address the root causes of irregular migration and provide a comprehensive framework for the Euro-Mediterranean region. On 17 January of this year, I presided over the meeting of the national Parliaments of the 5+5 Western Mediterranean Dialogue Member States. Members of Parliament present agreed on a set of conclusions focusing on climate change and sustainable development, migration and humanitarian action, youth, education and employment. Through the Valletta Conclusions we reaffirmed the need to give the utmost importance to the root causes of migration and to highlight the need of a concerted and holistic approach.

Let us rekindle this belief also here and promote the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean as an important platform that directly represents the voice of the Euro-Mediterranean people and promotes a better understanding of the realities, challenges and opportunities in the region.

Esteemed Colleagues,

I feel it is imperative to bring the human component at the forefront of our discussions. Before I continue, I wish to share with you quotes from a July 2018 report by Human Rights Watch following visits to various detention centres in Libya:

“There is ill treatment here and beatings. They lock women and children inside for days”

*“There is very little water, the areas are very overcrowded,
there is lack of ventilation and sanitary conditions are in a terrible state”*

“We are losing our minds just waiting”

“We need blankets, beds, hygiene kits. [...]”

“I’m supposed to burn and replace beds when people leave but we don’t have enough.”

These statements, including also observations by detention centre officers, offer a small glimpse into the sheer problems and hardships experienced by migrants detained in detention centres. They also provide a slight understanding of the difficulties and somewhat grave conditions the Libyan people have to work in to provide humanitarian assistance and border control.

Therefore, it is with a heavy heart that I feel that we cannot address the topic of migration without admitting to ourselves that we have failed.

We have failed as a region to provide a safe and secure channel for people escaping war, poverty and persecution.

We have failed our southern neighbours when we continue to ignore the social, economic and health pressures that these countries face to host large numbers of people.

Most of all, we have failed our own children, who continue to witness an adult generation too busy to build walls to realise that migration is part of our every existence and shared history. When I hear some politicians speak about the importance of erecting walls, closing ports and stopping departures, I realise that we are living in a surreal state of denial—denial of the fact that people are being pushed out of their country of origin due to war, poverty and persecution to be later detained for an indeterminate period of time in appalling and dangerous conditions. Therefore, the person has no other option if not to agree to a voluntary repatriation, slowly deteriorate in a detention centre or once more try to cheat death and risk reaching Europe in extreme conditions.

Colleagues,

It is clear that it is in fact this vicious limbo that is acting as a pull factor towards Europe. How can a person that has been escaping from an already tragic reality and now living in possibly worse conditions be convinced that our intentions and programmes are guided by the core principles of human rights? How can we continue to deny that if we do not address these issues we will continue to face unprecedented numbers of people trying to cross towards Europe? And finally, how can we convince our southern partners that we mean to promote an inclusive Euro-Mediterranean region if we do not take collective responsibility?

As Presidents of our respective parliaments it is important we raise these questions.

Esteemed Colleagues

We are all in a *negative race not to welcome people*. This is how the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi has recently described European Union Member States. In all honesty, I could not agree more. Whilst recognizing that border security is important and international agreements should be respected, it is inhumane and intrinsically wrong to leave men, women and children out at sea or close to land but refused entry. This practice needs to stop.

To conclude, I wish to reiterate my strong belief that a humane approach to migration should include:

- Safeguards to protect and never detain the most vulnerable, especially unaccompanied minors
- Irrevocable standards of protection for all human beings irrespective of legal status, place of disembarkation or stay
- Efficient legal channels operating within a structured and balanced mechanism at a Euro-Mediterranean level
- Resources to promote good quality employment, environmentally sustainable practices and the inclusion of democratic and civil liberties in countries of origin and transit

Thank you