

SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY MARIE-LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT OF MALTA, AT A RECEPTION ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL DAY OF THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS. FRIDAY, 25 APRIL 2014.

Honorable Mr Speaker,
Honorable Ministers,
Hourable Parliamentary Secretaries,
President Emeriti,
Excellencies,
Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you Your Excellency, Ambassador Rita Dulci Rahman, for the kind words you have just expressed. I am privileged to be here with you today, to celebrate the National Day of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and would like, on behalf of the Government and People of Malta, to convey my best wishes to His Royal Highness

King William Alexander, and to the Government and People of the Netherlands.

It is a known fact, that the relations between Malta and the Kingdom of The Netherlands, are characterised by a strong diplomatic friendship that dates back to 1965, just after Malta obtained its Independence. In the course of time, relations between the two countries strengthened due to a number of initiatives, which include the relocation by the Dutch government, of 20 refugees during 2012. I must say that this was the second time that the Dutch government assisted Malta in the relocation of refugees, with the first taking place in 2005. Such a gesture, on the part of the Government of The Netherlands, is a concrete act of solidarity between nations, which should be

lauded and followed by other European Union Member States.

Malta and the Netherlands managed to establish excellent cooperation in the Military. It suffices to highlight, that for two consecutive years, personnel from the Armed Forces of Malta, operated in the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) in Somalia. I am proud to note, that the twelve Maltese AFM Officers that participated in the 2010-2011 peace Missions, were decorated with medals, by the Dutch authorities, in recognition of their service and participation, on board Dutch vessels. Furthermore, I am informed that the 22-strong AFM force, that was deployed on board a Royal Netherlands Navy warship, participating in the EU Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Operation Atlanta, in Somalia, in the second half of last year, was a success.

Indeed, we have reason to look forward to enhanced cooperation, including a wider spectrum of sectors of mutual benefit.

Excellency,

When it comes to commercial relations, trade between the two countries is relatively stable, however, there are opportunities for improvement, and exporters from both countries, would do well to expand their commercial interaction to explore new products, which could be traded for the benefit of both sides. On the other hand, Financial Services remains one of Malta's main pillars, upon which local economic growth is geared to continue to grow. The opening of a Dutch Credit Europe Bank office in Malta, in 2008, is a step in the right direction.

Another important pillar that is vital to the Maltese economy is undoubtedly tourism. I am pleased to note that the traffic of tourists travelling between the two countries, is doing very well, and has reached a peak in 2012. One augurs that both sides will continue to work in this direction, which, not only stimulate the economy, but also gives added value to our two nations and people, through healthy interaction.

This could continue to strengthen, prior to Malta's EU Council Presidency of 2017, which will be preceded by that of The Netherlands and Slovakia. Such timely event, should serve us to come closer together, and present to the European Council, an agenda that reflects the aspirations of a united Europe, based on the inherent values of peace, solidarity and equal opportunities to all.

As members of the European Union, Malta and The Netherlands are tangible examples, of countries, that managed to crest the wave of economic crisis which hit the euro zone, and plunged most of its members into deep recession. I believe, that the secret behind our success was the fact that both our respective countries managed to turn challenges into concrete opportunities, while taking the necessary measures against unwanted decline. It is worth noting that although geographically distant, both our countries remain closer than ever, through their prolonged commitment towards change and innovation.

Another element, which will bring our countries together in the coming years is when in 2018, Valletta and the Dutch city of Leeuwarden (*Liu-*

war-den), will have the honour, to share the title of European Capital of Culture. Malta is giving this event great importance, and has plans in full swing, to make sure, that this event remains a legacy of Maltese creativity, in all its aspects beyond 2018. As to the relations, between the two cities hosting the event, the Valletta 2018 Foundation has already signed a Memorandum of Understanding, of Cooperation with Leeuwarden (*Liu-war-den*), which should pave the way, to further cooperation between the two sides.

Indeed, we have reason to believe, that diplomatic relations between our two countries are bright. I am also confident that, as has been the case in the past, both our countries in their respective ways, as well as in their capacity as members of the European Union, should continue to strive for

peace and stability, which are vital elements to any development and success, which our countries and peoples could achieve.

Your Excellency,

Permit me to mention a few personal reflections regarding the origins and natural development of our countries. Our lands' common origin is the sea. The Dutch people have not only managed to acquire their land from the sea, but also, they managed, throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, dominate the ubiquitous Ocean, discovered new lands, and finally, made The Netherlands, one of the foremost cultural, commercial and financial centres for the Western World. The achievement of the Dutch people, surpass by far, the size of your land.

As The Netherlands owes its excellence to the sea, so does Malta. Throughout our long history, for Europe, Malta was its beleaguered outpost, in the Mediterranean, and our livelihood, indeed our very natural existence, was associated with the sea. In time, we managed to make good use of our military maritime experience. This experience served us well to convert an economy which was totally dependent on military spending, to a modern economy, based on tourism, high tech industries and financial services. Both the Netherlands and Malta are living examples, of what small nations can achieve, by responding successfully, to the challenges of what the ancient Greeks used to refer to as ‘the estranging sea.’ The sea has served as a thriving opportunity for Malta, and serves as the best communication medium.

Ladies and gentlemen,

May I now invite you all, to raise your glasses, and drink to the national day of the Kingdom of The Netherlands, the good health of His Royal Highness, King William Alexander, and to the excellent relations between our two countries?

Thank you