

TOAST DELIVERED BY H.E. MARIE-LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT OF MALTA ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL DAY OF FRANCE. MONDAY, 14 JULY 2014.

Honourable Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries,
Honourable Leader of the Opposition,
Excellencies,
Members of Parliament
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you, Your Excellency, for the reflections you have just shared with us this evening. It is an honour to be here to mark the anniversary of *Fete de la Federation*, celebrated on the 14 July.

I thank you for your hospitality in your beautiful residence, in one of our typical, traditional villages.

Kindly convey to His Excellency, President François Hollande, and to the People of France, our sincere

best wishes on the special occasion of the National Day of France.

Excellency,

The '*Festival of the Federation*' which was celebrated one year after the Bastille insurrection, paved the way for the implementation of the core values of freedom, democracy and human rights.

It was a time of great aspirations that gradually found their way in the overall social fabric of France, and Europe as a whole. What we are today is, in many ways, the fruit of what took place back then.

Shared commitment towards stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean, makes our two countries natural partners in the establishment of a peaceful world order.

We believe in an order that is based on the value of the individual, as much as on the need to live in a dignified environment.

We believe in an environment that must create social solidarity and ensure equal opportunities for all.

Malta is firmly determined to continue with its claim to make the Mediterranean a hub of intercultural dialogue, where people can freely interact and prosper, as well as bring forward the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Excellency,

This year, Malta and France celebrate 50 years of excellent bilateral relations. The resolve of both countries to make their relationship a successful story, is evident in the broad sphere of cooperation, which over the years, translated into significant French-owned investment in important sectors, like

the financial services, registered gaming, telecommunications and tourism among others.

The excellent institutional relations have been characterised also by high-level meetings, most recently, by President Hollande's visit to Malta during the 5+5 Summit in 2012, and the official visit of Prime Minister The Honourable Joseph Muscat to France shortly after taking office last year.

Such significant high-level encounters reflect the special, friendly relationship between us, and also send a message that stability and mutual respect come through active engagement and dialogue.

I am pleased to note that this year's traditional military parade, has particular significance as we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Great War.

During this year's parade, which takes place along the beautiful Champs Elysées, Malta will be represented

by four Armed Forces officers, carrying the Maltese colours.

This bilateral relationship is further strengthened through our membership of the European Union.

As a member of the European Union, Malta has good reason to look back with satisfaction, on a decade of impressive achievements, which contributed, in no small way, to the reinforcing of Maltese socio-economic prowess.

France is one of the founding members of the European Union, with its driving vision to enhance cooperation and solidarity between Member States.

The Europe of Frenchmen Schuman and Monnet, amongst others, should continue to enlighten our ways of doing politics, especially at a time of ever increasing social, economic and security challenges, which evidently calls for bolder decisions, and the

consolidation of the inherent values that distinguish Europe as a true agent of change.

Malta's commitment towards making membership in the European Union, a dynamic experience, is most visible in its ability to create better living conditions for the Maltese people.

In the meantime, the influx from irregular immigration towards European shores and the political instability in neighbouring Libya, Syria, Iraq and the Middle East, requires sound political commitments from all European partners to ensure that the values of freedom, peace and solidarity among nations and their respective people remain untouched.

We cannot aspire to have security in Europe, unless there is peace and security in the Mediterranean.

Excellency,

Malta and France boast of strong ties that go back a long time. Our rich historic and cultural connections, are one aspect which make our people-to-people contact richer and more fruitful.

In France there are around 800 citizens of Maltese nationality living in the cities of Paris, Marseilles and Lyon. Indeed, it was a privilege for me to meet some of them at the Maltese Embassy in Paris last month.

My Presidency remains committed to them, and to their well-being, as much as it is committed to each and every Maltese living on these islands.

The French language in Malta is given its due precedence, even more so now, with Maltese representation in European Union fora.

Here, I recall that this year the Alliance Française is celebrating its 55th anniversary since setting up an office in Malta. I wish to thank the French government for taking such an important initiative

which enabled hundreds of Maltese students to learn and enjoy the beauty of, the French language, as well as come closer to French traditions and culture.

As you may be aware, in four years' time, Valletta will be the European Capital of Culture, a prestigious event which we are looking forward to with great expectations.

I am pleased to note that the Valletta 2018 Foundation and the city of Marseille which held the title in 2013 are working closely together on specific projects which would make both cities understand each other better.

Excellency,

14th July is a day that should continue to encourage each and every one of us who treasure freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, to engage further in our aspiration towards *liberty, equality and fraternity*.

At a time when we are looking for pointers, that somehow embody the true significance of solidarity between nations and peoples alike, the French National Day remains a model for exchange through shared ideals, perhaps like no other.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let's raise our glasses and drink to the health of H.E. President François Hollande, as well as to the excellent relations and friendship between the Republic of Malta and the Republic of France.