



Press Release

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**STATE VISIT TO MALTA BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
ROSEN ASENOV PLEVNELIEV**

Speech by President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca at State Dinner in honour of President of the Republic of Bulgaria Rosen Plevneliev at The Palace, Valletta

Your Excellency, President Rosen Plevneliev,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Friends,

It is an honour to welcome His Excellency, President Rosen Plevneliev, here in Malta for this State Visit.

Diplomatic relations were established between our countries in 1971.

Relations between Malta and the Republic of Bulgaria have become stronger over time. They reflect our mutual commitment to the prosperity and wellbeing of the peoples of our nations.

Over the years, collaboration and bilateral agreements have flourished in a number of sectors and areas of interest, alongside our mutual membership in the European Union.

Indeed, both our countries can look forward to their respective Presidencies of the Council of the European Union; Malta in the first half of 2017, and Bulgaria in the second half of 2018. I am confident that many areas of shared interest shall be kept high on our respective agendas.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to hold talks with President Plevneliev, while I was in Sofia, to address a conference which launched the Council of Europe's Strategy for the Rights of the Child. It is reassuring to note that the wellbeing of children, in both our nations, is a priority we hold in common.

I also welcome the positive response, expressed by the Bulgarian President during his meeting with Ambassador Lino Bianco, to engage with the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, and to collaborate on issues of social solidarity and community empowerment.

I firmly believe that we must encourage the active participation of civil society, and an inclusive sense of citizenship, in order to strengthen the fundamental principles of our democracies.

Attachments: none

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It is these principles, of mutual respect for the dignity of all and of support for the most vulnerable, which must guide our efforts. In this way, we will create a spirit of solidarity that shall benefit our countries and our regions.

Many of these themes appeared in our deliberations during this year's Arraiolos Meeting of non-executive European Heads of State, held in Bulgaria, and Malta is proud to be hosting next year's meeting.

I hope we shall continue to focus on building stronger networks between European countries, and to work further together to ensure that European citizens, will believe more, in the need for our European project.

Meanwhile, exports between our countries have seen a healthy rise over the past few years, particularly in the areas of pharmaceuticals, electrical machinery and mechanical appliances. Therefore, Your Excellency, let us continue to encourage economic synergy which fosters mutual investment and trade for the benefit of both our peoples.

In this spirit of relationship-building, it is also encouraging to note that the number of Bulgarian visitors to Malta keeps rising.

Trips to Bulgaria are becoming ever more popular with Maltese visitors. In view of the European Union commitments shared by both our countries, let us prioritise this flow of visitors and build on our successes.

Malta offers exceptional quality in education tourism, with world-renowned English language teaching services as well as opportunities for higher learning. This is evident in the ERASMUS+ agreement, entered last year, between the University of Malta and several Bulgarian universities.

A similar agreement is being prepared between the University of Malta and the prestigious National Academy of Music in Sofia.

I am pleased to say that agreements have also been reached, to facilitate knowledge-sharing between the National Library and National Archives of Malta, and St Cyril and St Methodius National Library of Sofia.

It is through such efforts to generate cultural capital, as well as economic and social exchanges, that we will strengthen the flourishing friendship which exists between our two peoples.

Last year, I was pleased to co-host an event which commemorated the Feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius. It was an opportunity for the Bulgarian community living in Malta to share their culture with the Maltese people, in an atmosphere of celebration.

Furthermore, the Saints Cyril and Methodius Sunday School set up last year, is offering Bulgarian language and literature courses to Bulgarian children residing in Malta. Assisted by the Ministry of Culture in Bulgaria, these courses are now also open to Maltese students.

In conclusion, let us remember that it is through such opportunities for connecting across our cultures, that we can pursue the wellbeing of the families and communities in our societies and across our countries.

I trust that a strong spirit of partnership shall continue to grow between our peoples. I am confident that Malta and Bulgaria will keep firm in our united efforts to foster shared prosperity and sustainable peace in our countries and our regions, for the benefit of both present and future generations.