

**SPEECH BY H.E. MARIE LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT OF MALTA AT THE
CLOSING OF THE STATE OF EUROPE FORUM**

8 May 2017

**Mr Jeff Fountain, Director Schuman Centre and Convenor of the State
of Europe Forum**

Rev. Prof. Hector Scerri, Chairman of the Malta Ecumenical Council

Honourable Members of Parliament and of the European Parliament

Distinguished guests,

Dear friends

Let me begin by thanking all the organisers, and in particular Mr Jeff Fountain and Reverend Prof Hector Scerri, for bringing together this distinguished international gathering.

It is my pleasure to bring to a close the State of Europe Forum.

I am informed that this Forum has been inspired by Malta's national history, to reflect on the themes of hope, of healing, and of hospitality.

I am convinced that your two-day Forum was a constructive experience for you, and that the outcomes will be disseminated, and put in practice in your respective communities.

It is encouraging to note that representatives from the diverse Christian communities in Malta have been included to join in an ecumenical display of solidarity.

I believe that, we must work together, alongside people of other faith traditions, to ensure that we include and engage with all the members of our societies in Europe, and beyond.

At this time of great global uncertainty, we must reassert the fundamental values of peace and holistic wellbeing, which are the cornerstone of our European aspirations.

I believe that we need a global and regional social solidarity approach, which safeguards the holistic wellbeing of each and every member of our human family.

We need to work in synergy, in a spirit of trust, to achieve the common good.

We need to take action, courageously and efficiently, on behalf of the vulnerable, the excluded, and the oppressed.

Furthermore, I believe, that above all, we need to build a culture of positive peace, which takes proactive steps to nurture respect and dignity, in our communities, in our societies, and in our nations.

We can no longer afford to think of peace as the mere absence of warfare.

Positive peace is the commitment to strive together, in pursuit of a common goal for an inclusive society.

We must be guided by fundamental human rights and freedoms, in order to ensure that everybody is included.

In many ways, Europe has been built on these values of solidarity, of peace, and of holistic wellbeing.

These values are present in our different faith traditions, and are a powerful component in the heritage of Christianity.

It is this heritage, which had such a significant role, in the history of our European Union.

In particular, let us remember the contribution of one of the architects of the Union, Robert Schuman, whose vision is relevant to this Forum.

Therefore, allow me to quote from his declaration of 9 May 1950, which many people consider to be the genesis of the European project.

Schuman believed that the rebuilding of the European Community would only be possible if it was, and I quote, “deeply rooted in basic Christian values”. End quote.

The values of solidarity, of peace, and of holistic wellbeing, are firmly embedded within the traditions of Christianity; however, they are not unique to it.

These values are shared by all individuals and groups of goodwill.

They unite us all in one universal sense of solidarity, and one united desire to build a long-lasting, and sustainable peace.

Let us recognise that it is these values of solidarity, of peace, and of holistic wellbeing, which had such a profound impact during the establishment of the European Union.

Moreover, these values have lost none of their importance, as we move forward today.

The primary message derived from these values, is a commitment of profound respect towards other cultures and groups, even those who seem, to be very different from our own.

This sense of respect is more important now, than ever before.

Putting real respect into practice means taking steps to achieve reconciliation, and to take every opportunity to be effective peace-builders.

Forgiveness, reconciliation and healing, must underpin all our efforts to build positive peace within our communities, our societies, and across our nations.

To sustain long-lasting positive peace, we need to include everybody.

We cannot allow discrimination to go unchallenged, whether on the basis of gender, of sexual orientation, of ethnicity or race, of social background or culture.

We cannot allow prejudice and hatred to disrupt the circles of respect and trust.

It is only by nurturing respect and trust, that we can move forward, and be effective activists for peace and focused champions of wellbeing.

Other essential Christian values are equality, and equity, which both underpin the European project and should continue to strengthen it today.

In the holy texts of all Abrahamic faiths, the intrinsic dignity of every human being is essential.

The human person is, we are told, created in the image of God.

Thus, the human person should be filled with dignity, goodness and truth.

No matter who we are, or where we are from, we should be united as one family, filled with one sense of purpose, to love and to be loved.

This sense of unity, which finds direct expression in a human rights-based approach, gave strong foundations to the European Union.

Not only should all individuals be equal, but also all nations should be equal.

For this reason, we must resist the rhetoric of fragmentation and division which is, I am sad to say, re-appearing in Europe.

We must be strong advocates for peace and unity, against the false populism of demagogues and the scaremongering of opportunists.

However, I am pleased to note the recent experiences in the Netherlands and France.

These experiences showed that the majority of the people are strongly committed to the foundations of the European project.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights leads us to yet another principle.

This principle is prominent in all of our faiths, and in all philosophies, which aim to secure peace and holistic wellbeing.

The essential truth is, that we must love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

Let me encourage you to never stop striving to ensure that this message, be effective in our lives, and in the lives of our communities and nations.

Let me encourage you to spread the knowledge that globalisation brings our communities and nations closer together. Globalisation also brings new opportunities for our shared prosperity.

We are stronger and more stable in our European Union when we combine the potential of our nations, to work for a common purpose with partners and collaborators from across the world.

The love we must show to our neighbours, should transcend our differences.

The love we must show to our neighbours, should celebrate our diversity.

The love we must show to our neighbours, should always promote dialogue and understanding.

Europe has come a long way since its visionary beginning, proposed by people like Robert Schuman and his contemporaries.

However, there is much we can still learn from the legacy that they have handed down to us.

Let me conclude my remarks by asserting, once again, that we must continue promoting a culture of positive peace, a culture of encounter, and processes of dialogue with others.

We must work in synergy to create real reconciliation and lasting unity.

In this way, we shall build positive peace among our nations, and strive together for the holistic wellbeing and lasting prosperity of both present and future generations.

Thank you.