

**SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY MARIE-LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA,
PRESIDENT OF MALTA, AT A RECEPTION HELD ON THE OCCASION
OF THE NATIONAL DAY OF ITALY, 2017**

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Dear Friends

Italy's "Festa della Repubblica" is a special day for us. This special day is an opportunity to rekindle the strong ties of friendship, which have united our two nations throughout history and today.

In this spirit of celebration, please convey, in my name and on behalf of the Government and the People of Malta, our best wishes on this occasion to my friend, His Excellency, Presidente Sergio Mattarella, and to the Government and the People of Italy.

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Malta and the Republic of Italy have flourished since they were first established in 1964.

However, the special bond between our countries, is evident in our historical heritage and traditions, and dates back across the centuries.

The closeness between us is manifest, even in the fact that Italians constitute the largest group of European Union nationals, who are living and working in the Maltese Islands.

Moreover, marriages between Maltese and Italian citizens further strengthen this closeness, through familial ties.

The friendship between our peoples is further consolidated, thanks to a bilateral framework, which covers multiple sectors.

Furthermore, during Malta's ongoing Presidency of the Council of the EU, two of the main priority areas for Malta, as well as for Italy, have been migration and the Mediterranean.

Sharing the same sea, the same region, and such close geographical and cultural proximity, naturally leads us to have similar policy perspectives on these important issues.

We mutually acknowledge the need for inclusive dialogue, among diverse stakeholders, for the benefit of the peoples of the Mediterranean region.

This was also one of the issues of discussion, when I met with Presidente Mattarella while he was in Malta in 2015.

I had the opportunity to meet with the President again, during my visit to Rome in January of this year.

I anticipate pursuing our discussions, when Presidente Mattarella joins us, for a State Visit, and preceding his participation in the Arraiolos Meeting in September.

I am sure that both our nations shall continue to work together, to achieve equitable prosperity, sustainable peace, and holistic wellbeing for our societies.

Italy is also Malta's largest trading partner by a wide margin. A healthy increase in exports was also registered last year.

Our business collaboration is evidenced by over 3,300 firms with Italian shareholding interests in Malta. This is by far the largest number of shareholders in Malta, from any country.

Let me also take this opportunity to commend the work of the Embassy of Malta in Rome, which collaborates with Bank of Valletta, Finance Malta, Trade Malta, and Malta Enterprise, in

conjunction with local the Chambers of Commerce, and other stakeholders, to organise regular business seminars in Italy.

I would also like to avail myself of this opportunity to encourage our business communities to pursue their mutual collaboration, to enhance other opportunities for growth.

In the sector of tourism, which is an important economic pillar and has so much potential as a gateway for dialogue and connection between diverse communities and cultures, Malta has witnessed a steady growth in the number of visitors from Italy.

Many visitors from Italy are also availing themselves of Malta's expertise in the area of Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Indeed, Italian students are the largest group of citizens who are choosing Malta as their preferred destination, and make up one fourth of all students who register to learn English in Malta.

Such examples of mutual sharing and friendship are being made proactively stronger, particularly in the cultural sector.

Many cultural events have been organised, and continue to be organised, in our respective countries, thanks to the Istituto Italiano di Cultura and Malta's National Arts Council. Other examples include an exhibition on Mattia Preti, held last year, which was hosted in Siracusa and registered over 5 million visitors.

Furthermore, earlier this year, the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union was launched with an exhibition entitled "Mediterraneo in Chiaroscuro", organised by Malta's national art institution, MUZA, together with Palazzo Barberini.

Let me also take this opportunity to personally thank His Excellency, Umberto de Vito, and Madam Hadar Halevy, for their support to my Office, over the past years, in various initiatives.

Furthermore, I am confident that Valletta's position as European Capital of Culture in 2018 will lead towards more enriching opportunities for cultural cooperation between our peoples.

Eccellenze

Distinti ospiti

Cari amici

Permettetemi di concludere esprimendo un sentimento in lingua Italiana; un sentimento, che le nostre nazioni dovrebbero condividere; un espressione d'orgoglio per i nostri valori Europei che nascono e rimangono radicati nella forza delle nostre rispettive democrazie.

Sono questi i valori di pace, e solidarietà sociale, che garantiscono la dignità umana nella vita di tutti i nostri cittadini.

A questo proposito, cari amici, propongo un brindisi a nome della stretta amicizia che accomuna Malta e l'Italia, e alla salute del Presidente Sergio Mattarella, al quale invio i miei più sinceri saluti.