

**Welcome Speech for the Arraiolos Meeting, delivered by HE Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, September 2017**

**It is a pleasure and an honour for Malta to host the 13th Meeting of the Arraiolos Group. I am also pleased to welcome the largest Arraiolos gathering of non-executive Presidents of the European Union, which includes, for the very first time, three female European Heads of State.**

**Dear colleagues,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,  
Dear friends,**

**Let me take this opportunity to welcome you to Maltese Islands.**

**Malta's geo-strategic position, in the Middle of the Mediterranean, means that we have always been at the crossroads of civilisations and continents, and a melting pot of peoples and cultures.**

**For this reason, the importance of dialogue and the building of mutual peace are values of essential importance, both to our way of life and to our vision for the future of our European Union.**

**I am confident that this meeting is an opportunity for us to deepen this sense of dialogue, and the discovery of shared opportunities for peace, while focusing on issues of pressing importance in our regions and across our Union.**

**This year also happens to mark the 60th Anniversary of the signing of the important Treaties of Rome, which laid the foundations for the European Union as we know it today.**

**At a time when our Union is prioritising its attention on the promotion of a European Pillar of Social Rights, I believe that it is essential for us to discuss the social dimension of our Union.**

**I believe that it is also our responsibility, as Heads of State, to ensure that questions of social justice, of socio-economic inclusion, and of democratic participation are kept high on the agenda of our respective countries, and across our family of nations.**

**Furthermore, this year's Arraiolos Meeting will also be, as our previous meetings were, an opportunity for us to increase the visibility of the particular challenges and opportunities within our regions, with a special emphasis on the situation being faced in the Euro-Mediterranean area.**

**Excellencies, dear colleagues,**

**I augur that our deliberations, throughout the Arraiolos Meeting, shall be guided by our universal values of positive peace and holistic wellbeing, for the benefit of our communities, our societies, and our European family of nations.**

**The theme for this year's meeting, "Crossing Borders", is an invitation for all of us to reflect on how Europe can rediscover its core social values, reclaim its social model, and achieve higher levels of solidarity and inclusion.**

**During our deliberations, I am confident that social justice will feature prominently, as a basic condition for European prosperity and Euro-Mediterranean security.**

**Let us ensure that our deliberations will emphasise the need for Europe to be a global leader, once again, on issues that affect the quality of life of all peoples.**

**The decision to focus on such a complex and intriguing theme will, I am sure, help us to create an important dialogue, bridging our diverse opinions, while also creating opportunities for connection and mutual enrichment.**

**I sincerely believe that creating such opportunities for dialogue is especially necessary, in particular, at this important juncture in the history of our world. We must admit, that unfortunately, many of our nations are currently facing social and political tensions and uncertainties.**

**In response to these tensions and uncertainties, it is my firmly held belief that we cannot only implement economic globalisation, without a parallel investment in strategies for social justice.**

**We cannot be afraid to be one humanity, united together, embracing our social as well as economic realities.**

**We cannot be afraid to tackle pressing questions of poverty, social exclusion, and economic precarity, which are of such direct impact on the communities and societies of our nations.**

**Let us therefore use this platform to promote closer collaborations, across the borders of our nations, to face some of the major challenges of the twenty-first century.**

**Many of the important issues we face today are global in their reach. These include questions of economic globalisation; processes of**

**migration; social uncertainties; the threat of transnational crime; and the promotion of global peace and security.**

**Such challenges can only be addressed with a united approach. Meeting these challenges requires that we all work together, to transcend our borders, as one human family.**

**First of all, I believe that we need to address the harmful effects of climate change, which are being felt across our world, with a holistic and united approach.**

**I am pleased to note that, even in yesterday's State of the Union speech, His Excellency Jean-Claude Juncker, European Commission President, highlighted the critical issue of climate change.**

**I quote, "*Europe will ensure we make our planet great again. It is the shared heritage of all of humanity.*" End quote.**

**For this reason, we must act now to do more, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across our nations.**

**We must make the necessary progress towards a low carbon energy future, for all.**

**We must learn from the good practices of our neighbours, some of whom are present here as stakeholders in the Arraiolos meeting, and share our knowledge in pursuit of one common goal for a better world.**

**We must work together to find innovative ways for our nations to produce and to use clean and renewable energy.**

**For this reason, our holistic endeavours and collaborations are important, to implement the the mandate of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the United Nations' Agenda 2030, with its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.**

**We all know what must be done, as these Sustainable Development Goals offer us a global strategy, which promotes shared prosperity for the building of peace, and a global social solidarity approach.**

**It is so important for us to focus our attention on the values which promote a universal culture of respect, to ensure that the intrinsic dignity of each and every individual is celebrated.**

**I am confident that our discussions shall be effectively guided, along these lines, by the expert contributions of our two academic facilitators.**

**Professor Carmelo Borg shall focus on the idea of reclaiming Europe's social mandate, and Professor Stephen Calleya shall tackle the management of security challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean region.**

**It is my hope that, throughout this meeting, we shall become more sensitive and more aware of the particular nature of our respective situations.**

**Moreover, I hope that, by sitting around the same table and engaging in frank discussions, we shall find new ways of working together to meet our shared challenges and maximise our shared opportunities.**

**Each and every one of us has the potential to spread a strong message of solidarity, of peace, and of social justice, within our nations and across Europe.**

**On concluding, let me once again quote yesterday's State of the Union address, delivered by the President of the European Commission, who said, and I quote;**

***“Now is the time to build a more united, stronger and more democratic Europe for 2025.”*** End quote.

**In this spirit, I urge us all to endeavour to ensure that no citizens or residents in our countries are left behind.**

**We must continue building stronger processes of democratic participation within our societies, so that the citizens of Europe will feel a sense of ownership over our European Union.**

**Finally, let us ensure that the outcomes of our deliberations will have a positive effect in the lives of all our peoples, across our communities, and for the ultimate benefit of our entire European family of nations.**