
*Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta during the
Ukrainian-Maltese Business Forum*

17th October 2017

**My dear friend, President Poroshenko,
Honourable Minister Konrad Mizzi, Minister for Tourism,
Honourable Minister Carmelo Abela, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade
Promotion,
Honourable Silvio Schembri, Parliamentary Secretary for Financial Services, Digital
Economy, and Innovation,
Ambassador John Debono,
Excellencies,
Members of the business communities of Malta and Ukraine,
Dear friends,**

Once again, I would like to reiterate that it is a great pleasure to be in your beautiful country. Let me start by expressing my appreciation to my dear friend, His Excellency President Poroshenko, and to the Government of Ukraine, for the warm welcome and great hospitality, extended to me and to my delegation.

Our presence here bears witness to the importance that Malta is giving, to building closer collaborations with Ukraine, and to nurturing the friendship that already exists between our two peoples.

We feel that there is much we hold in common.

Both our countries serve as strategic hubs in our respective regions of the world. Malta is a bridge that connects cultures and continents, placed strategically between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

On the other hand, Malta is not only a member of the European Union, but is also a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, which brings together 53 other countries from across the whole world.

Similarly, Ukraine is a strategic hub, providing perfect access to Eastern Europe. I am, therefore, confident that our geo-strategic positions can be positively explored, for many socio-economic opportunities, to collaborate and to develop fruitful partnerships between our countries and our business communities.

By working in synergy, not only will the business sectors of Malta and Ukraine flourish, but our markets will also extend and expand.

Now is the perfect time for us, as there are a number of encouraging factors, which are creating the right environment to facilitate such processes of partnership.

For example, the recently signed EU-Ukraine Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, and the Double Taxation Agreement between Malta and Ukraine, are vital tools which will encourage new and innovative relationships between our businesses.

Moreover, Malta's significant success through its impressive economic growth, and Ukraine's endeavours for a successful economic reform programme, are two other important factors, conducive to a positive business environment.

We believe that now, there is another important next step, that we have considered and already acted upon. This is the necessary connectivity, to facilitate communication for our businesses and our peoples.

The presence of Malta's Minister of Tourism and the Chairman of Air Malta, is evidence of the political will of my government, to develop this necessary connectivity between our two countries.

This connectivity is of the utmost importance, to facilitate healthy business collaborations and partnerships. Through effective and direct air travel between Malta and Ukraine, not only will our business communities benefit, but so shall our tourism, hospitality, and travel sectors.

Air travel will also facilitate the growing Ukrainian community in Malta, to keep in touch with their families and their country of birth.

I am pleased to announce that during our deliberations this morning, the issue of air travel was addressed and in fact, meetings are already being held so that Air Malta, Malta's legacy airline, will start operating direct flights as from next spring.

I am also pleased to say that the Chairman of the Malta Tourism Authority is part of my delegation, because we already perceive the huge potential for both our nations and our tourism industries.

Tourism is not simply an economic operation, but also a means of bringing our two peoples together to develop sustainable friendship.

This State Visit is aimed at tangibly developing our already excellent diplomatic and political relations into practical results for our businesses, but also to develop stronger friendship between our peoples.

Furthermore, the presence in Ukraine of a strong and diverse trade delegation from Malta shows just how determined Maltese authorities and businesses are, to pursue closer collaborations among our authorities and business communities, to ensure that we grow and prosper together.

These are exciting times for Malta, as my country is at a stage of impressive economic growth, whereby our businesses are seeking new opportunities and avenues for expansion and investment, beyond the Maltese shores.

This is the potential that we bring with us, today, to Ukraine.

Moreover, it is essential that our collaborations take place across all levels of engagement. Not only will collaboration with larger enterprises be fruitful, but we must also promote connections between small and medium sized businesses.

These links will make a valuable contribution to the multi-level and mutual strengthening of our nations, and their respective geo-strategic positions as regional hubs.

Malta has much to offer in this area, including state-of-the-art institutions for training, logistics services, financial services, ICT, hospitality and tourism, and the teaching of English as a foreign language, amongst others.

Maltese representatives, present here today, are also bringing to the fore Malta's leading role in vocational education, and tertiary education in diverse fields of study.

Let me take this opportunity to highlight one sector in particular, as an example, namely, healthcare. Medical training at the University of Malta is world renowned, for both its medical and nursing schools.

The University of Malta attracts international students, and brings with it the prospect of European warrants, which will create employment opportunities for Ukrainian graduates, in the light of, also, the recent Visa Liberalisation Action Plan.

Contemporary processes of globalisation dictates the need for innovation and research. I believe that, for both of our countries, not only to survive but also to thrive, we must make effective investments in research, innovation, and start-ups.

The state-of-the-art Life Sciences Park in Malta is an opportunity for research, while various centres at the University of Malta, and Malta Enterprise all represent

opportunities for start-ups, as well as the possibility for collaborations built upon EU-funded projects.

Let me also commend the advances that Ukraine has made on the issue of blockchain technology. I believe there are many opportunities for Malta and Ukraine to benefit from sharing Ukrainian expertise in this area, particularly considering the healthy atmosphere for digital games and related sectors in both our countries.

Furthermore, Ukraine is very strong on agricultural produce. Malta is open for collaborations with Ukraine, to increase its agricultural markets, due to Malta's position as a logistical hub in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

I would like to encourage Malta Enterprise and its Ukrainian counterpart to explore this venture more deeply, thereby discovering the potential of Ukrainian produce, in collaboration with Malta's access and know-how when it comes to Northern African and Mediterranean markets.

Let me also encourage the Ukrainian company Antonov to consider expansion in Malta, by creating strategies for the storage of aviation spare parts, and testing through a European Union centre of certification. This would bring great benefits to both sides, and, for example, create a geographically closer, stable supply for Antonov's African fleets.

In conclusion, I believe that there is no limit to what we can achieve together. Our geo-strategic potential is immense, due to our respective positions as strong hubs in different, but complementary, regions.

The presence of our respective business communities here, today, are evidence of the strong commitment and enthusiasm, felt by our business sectors, to collaborate.

Governments are enablers of prosperity, and during these last years, there have been a number of very effective high-level meetings between our authorities, including the State Visit of President Poroshenko to Malta in May, and this present State Visit to Ukraine.

I believe that we must keep up the excellent momentum, which we have achieved so far, and take it to the next level.

I believe that, in order to build upon this momentum in the most effective way possible, we must facilitate the creation of a Joint Commission or Taskforce, forming synergies between our two governments, our respective Chambers, and business sectors.

By meeting regularly to continue to explore possibilities of trade and business between our countries, we shall also be providing a platform for trouble-shooting, and the continuous monitoring and facilitation of a healthy business environment.

I trust that my presence in Ukraine, together with my delegation, will not only help to further consolidate political and commercial ties between our two countries, but also will strengthen relations between the communities and the cultures of our nations.

I look forward to seeing the endeavours of our business communities bear fruit, during this Business Forum, and indeed beyond, for the lasting benefit of our peoples, our nations, and our regions.