
Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta at the Bulgaria-Malta Business Forum

5th February 2018

It is a great pleasure to be in your beautiful country. Let me begin by expressing my appreciation to His Excellency President Rumen Radev, and to the Government of Bulgaria, 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 create closer and more sustainable collaborations with Bulgaria, and to nurture the friendship that has exists between our two peoples, for many decades.

We are both united by the shared ideals of our European Union, built upon a firm foundation of respect for human rights; the upholding of the rule of law; and close cooperation among all of our respective countries.

I am confident that, just as the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union was a great success for my country and the peoples of Europe, so too shall the ongoing Bulgarian Presidency be an opportunity for further positive development, and growth.

Both our countries serve as strategic hubs in our respective regions of the world. The Maltese Islands are a bridge that connects cultures and continents, between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Bulgaria is similarly a strategic hub, which provides perfect access to the Western Balkans and beyond.

I am, therefore, confident that both 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.

Moreover, the presence of Malta's Minister for the Economy, Investment and Small Business, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion, and the Minister for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity, as part of this delegation, is evidence of the political will of my government, to explore further opportunities for sustainable collaboration and potential partnerships, between our two countries, in many sectors.

By working in synergy, not only will the business and social sectors of Malta and Bulgaria flourish, but our markets will also extend and expand, in the best interests of our peoples.

Now is the perfect time for us to move forward, to continue creating prosperity for our societies.

There is much potential, for mutual economic cooperation, between Malta and Bulgaria. This can be achieved through trade in services, and the provision of expertise, skills, and training in those areas where both our countries require mutual support.

I am pleased to note that tourism between our countries is increasing, exponentially.

I believe that tourism is an opportunity for economic growth, but it also, most importantly, provides person-to-person connections, which will result in a deepening of the cultural and social links between our peoples. For this reason, both our countries offer a rich and diverse tourist package, attracting all types of visitors.

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

For any further development and growth in this important sector, and further business collaborations, we must aim to develop regular, direct connectivity between our two countries. This is the reason for having the chairman of Malta's legacy and national airline, Air Malta, in my delegation.

Hence, we look forward to constructive discussions and concrete outcomes between Bulgaria Air and Air Malta.

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

Furthermore, the presence in Bulgaria of a strong and diverse trade delegation from Malta and Gozo 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 both Malta and Bulgaria, as we are both registering economic growth. In Malta, we are at a stage whereby, due to our impressive economic growth, our businesses are seeking new opportunities and avenues for expansion, beyond the Maltese shores.

This is the potential that we bring with us, today, to Bulgaria, Your Excellency and dear friends.

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

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

The Maltese Islands have 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 and Gozitan 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.

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 academic, scientific, and technical research, innovation, and start-ups.

I am confident that with the signing of four agreements and Memoranda of Understanding, between our respective business chambers, this mutual vision for growth and prosperity will be achieved, for the benefit of both our peoples.

Therefore, I would like to urge the Bulgarian and Maltese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Burgas Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Gozo Business Chamber, and the Bulgarian and Maltese Business Chambers, the Bulgarian Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion Agency, and Trade Malta, to keep the momentum of this visit, and to continue to explore all our mutual potential, as governments are only enablers.

In conclusion, I believe that there is no limit to what we can do and 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.

Let me encourage you all to keep up the excellent momentum, which we have achieved so far, and take it to the next level.

I am confident that my presence in Bulgaria, 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 our business communities and our nations.

I look forward to listening to the endeavours of our business communities, during the Business Forum and the business to business meetings, held earlier, for the lasting benefit of our peoples, our nations, and our regions.