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*Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta during a State Dinner in Her honour, hosted by The President of Bulgaria*

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5th February 2018

**[Salutations]**

**Distinguished guests**

**Dear friends;**

**Your Excellency, it is my pleasure to be in your beautiful country, for this State Visit. I would like to thank you for your warm welcome and hospitality, which is being shown to me and my delegation.**

**Your Excellency, it is truly a pleasure to meet with you, once again, after your visit to Malta for the Meeting of the Arraiolos Group, which was held in September of last year.**

**Today's various constructive meetings, between ourselves and our delegations, also included the important Business Forum, where both our business communities have come together to further explore collaborations, to grow and prosper together.**

**This political will, shown by both our countries, will surely deepen our relations, and will translate our excellent diplomatic and political relations, into tangible outcomes for the benefit of our respective peoples and regions.**

**The excellent connections between both our countries were further strengthened, during the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, where there was a focus on the Western Balkan region and other relevant issues.**

**I augur much success for the ongoing Bulgarian Presidency, because Malta continues to consider Bulgaria as an important stakeholder in the region, to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity, for all peoples.**

**In this context, let me quote the inspirational motto of the Bulgarian European Presidency, "United We Stand Strong."**

**I strongly attest to this motto, as it is only when we are united, as the diverse peoples of Europe, that our nations will be strong enough to face contemporary challenges.**

**Malta also commends the prioritisation of migration, in the Bulgarian programme for the European Presidency.**

**It is to be hoped that Bulgaria's efforts will build upon the Valletta Process and other subsequent endeavours, including the EU-Africa Summit, which has brought about effective dialogue, between the leaders of the European Union and the African continent.**

**I believe it is essential for us to continue to collaborate with our colleagues in Africa, to address the phenomenon of migration in a respectful and dignified manner, by reaching sustainable solutions for all.**

**While Malta is currently celebrating Valletta's term, as the European Capital of Culture for 2018, we look forward to welcoming inputs from the Bulgarian cultural sector.**

**Understanding and celebrating our diverse cultures makes our countries richer, by rooting us in the heritage of our past, while also guiding our progress forward, to meet the future, together.**

**The friendship that has developed between our nations has been built on our commitment, to shared values of mutual importance.**

**I am confident that our firm determination to create sustainable peace, within our respective regions, and to achieve solidarity among all nations of goodwill, will continue to nurture the ties between us, and our peoples.**

**I believe that we must continue to form stronger links between and among all our countries, and across the various regions of Europe, through an ongoing process of dialogue.**

**Your Excellency, let me also take the opportunity to commend you for the progress your country is making, which is leading to substantial improvements, that are strengthening the resilience and wellbeing of the people of Bulgaria.**

**I also believe we must continue to promote person-to-person contact, between our peoples, so as to build and strengthen sustainable friendship between our countries.**

**Furthermore, I consider that it is our responsibility to keep exploring further opportunities for our children and young people to come together, in a spirit of friendship.**

**Our children and young people are the leaders of tomorrow, therefore, we must do our utmost to enhance their understanding of the ideals of peace; the principles of democratic participation; respect for universal human rights and fundamental freedoms; and the upholding of the rule of law.**

**Let us raise our glasses, and toast to the excellent relations between Malta and Bulgaria, and to the prosperity and wellbeing of both our peoples.**