
*Opening Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta at
the European Development Days 2018, Brussels, 6th June 2018*

[Salutations]
President Juncker,
Your Majesties,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear friends.

I would like to thank President Juncker for inviting me to join you at the Opening Ceremony of the twelfth edition of the European Development Days.

I believe that to achieve the equal, equitable, and full participation of women, within the countries of the European Union, we must unite our efforts, to promote effective strategies for the socio-economic inclusion of all our women and girls.

We must admit that gender inequality and the barriers that women face, to achieve quality economic empowerment, remains one of the biggest challenges to the successful implementation of our global commitment for inclusive growth.

The entire international community has endorsed this objective, in the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

SDG 5 targets the need for gender equality, and for the empowerment of women and girls, as part of our united journey towards equality, equity, and justice for all.

Gender parity does not only promote peaceful and just societies, but, as research shows, it contributes substantially to global economic growth.

Women's economic empowerment involves access to adequate resources, to education, and to capacity building.

It must also involve the recognition of the care economy, within which women are highly represented.

We must do more, to create opportunities for women to be participants in decision-making, across the social and economic spheres of our countries.

Furthermore, we all know that the social and economic empowerment of women does not end with women themselves but it leads to the enrichment of our families, our communities, and our societies as a whole.

However, dear friends, there is a big difference between knowing that a thing is right, and doing the right thing.

We must admit that, we are not moving fast enough, to realistically achieve the empowerment of women and girls across the world.

We are still a long way off from reaching a fully gender-equal society in all countries of the European Union. The latest European Institute for Gender Equality Index states that, in some areas, the gaps, or inequalities are even bigger than they were ten years ago.

According to the latest data from Eurostat, full-time working women in the European Union would need an average rise of 19 percent of their hourly wage, to match male wages.

Although reports from Eurostat tell us that women are successful in gaining qualifications, their subsequent careers are more interrupted, less well paid, and often result in lower pensions.

Even the latest Global Gender Gap Report commissioned by the World Economic Forum, for 2017, states, that “gender parity is shifting into reverse... for the first time since the World Economic Forum started measuring it.”

Within the European Union, specifically the European Institute for Gender Equality Index, states that progress in the economic participation of women, has slipped backwards in 12 countries.

I would like to encourage us all, during these European Development Days, to take up more effective strategies for the increased inclusion of women in the socio-economic sectors of our Union.

An effective strategy from my own country is the implementation of access to free child-care centres. This has contributed to a 6% increase, of female participation in the Maltese workforce, over five years.

Europe is making considerable strides forward, in terms of legislation and policy. However, we are not keeping up the same pace, to achieve the much-needed mental and cultural leap, to overcome prejudice, patriarchal oppressions, discrimination, and socially sanctioned abuses of privilege.

Such discrimination does not only exist in the spheres of economic participation and employment.

If women and girls do not feel safe, protected, and respected, then their place within our economies will never truly reflect their potential.

For this reason, I am truly pleased that the European Union and the United Nations have come together, in a powerful synergy, to focus on the issue of ending violence on women and girls. This is being done through the Spotlight Initiative.

We cannot achieve the full participation of women in the economic life of our countries, while women and girls are still subject to unacceptable threats to their safety and wellbeing.

1 in 3 women in the EU has been a victim of physical and/or sexual violence, since the age of 15.

1 in 20 women in Europe have been the victims of rape.

55 percent of women have been victims of sexual harassment.

1 in 3 women has experienced abuse by a partner.

This data, from the European Commission, is evidence of the need to support projects such as the Spotlight Initiative, and the recently established European Observatory on Femicide, which is a collaboration between eight countries, including Israel, and which is located at the University of Malta.

These projects represent an essential investment in our aspirations, to end all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

I would like to encourage our European authorities to extend their spotlight to this vital work, and support, the expansion of the European Observatory on Femicide, across the European Union.

In this context, it is of the utmost importance that the Council of the European Union continues to push for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, in order to more effectively address our concerns.

I am proud that the EU's accession to the Convention, which is of such historical significance, took place during Malta's Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

On concluding, let us continue working together, to build a world in which the dignity and identity of every woman and girl is not only safeguarded, but most importantly, celebrated.

We all have the responsibility to act, now.

Let us work together, to continue empowering women and girls; to effectively address the underlying challenges which are causing a widening gender pay gap; and to end all forms of gender-based violence.

Equality is not about destroying or distorting the differences between women and men.

Equality is about embracing diverse people, of all genders, and creating a context in which each and every person, can pursue their legitimate aspirations, and be respected in the fullness of their human dignity.

