
Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta on the occasion of Europe Day 2018, 9 May 2018

[Salutations]
Distinguished guests,
Dear friends.

It is my pleasure to join you for this evening's celebrations of Europe Day. Together, we are celebrating the visionary aspirations of our foremothers and forefathers, which led to the formation of our European Union.

As we all know, on this day in 1950, following the terrible destruction which was left by two World Wars, it was the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, who made a proposal of immense significance, and laid the foundations of the European Union as we know it today.

Robert Schuman brought together the divided countries of Europe in a new spirit of solidarity, uniting their economic interests in such a way as to make the possibility of armed conflicts remote.

We also commemorate the vision of the six countries, which, in 1957, established the European Economic Community by signing the Treaty of Rome.

Last year, we celebrated the 60th anniversary since the signing. This historic moment took place during Malta's Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Treaty of Rome was the beginning of an ambitious journey, to achieve European inclusion and to nurture processes of integration, across all levels of political, social, economic, and cultural life.

I believe that the most fundamental legacy of the founding mothers and fathers of the European Union has been the creation of respectful spaces for dialogue, in which to address the challenges of a rapidly changing world, without turning to violence and conflict.

The biggest achievement for our European Union has been the way it replaced the rule of war with the rule of law.

However, I believe that peace is not simply the absence of war. Positive peace means a cultural and social transformation, that upholds the dignity of all, especially the most vulnerable.

The strength of our countries must be expressed by how fully we can contribute to the peace, prosperity, and wellbeing of our entire family of nations, and all of our citizens.

For this reason, although today is a day of celebration, it is also an opportunity for us to confront the many challenges that still face our Union.

The European Union is the world's second largest economy, yet the number of vulnerable people, living in poverty and precarity within our countries, remains unacceptably high.

In fact, according to the latest data from Eurostat, 17.3% of the population in the European Union are facing the risk of poverty.

Moreover, we must do more to address the particular challenges being faced by women in Europe.

The proposed EU Gender Action Plan for 2016 to 2020 must be given further impetus, to ensure that its targets are reached.

For example, we must effectively address the gender pay gap, which is widening rather than narrowing in many of our countries; we must promote female representation in our parliaments and other positions of authority; and above all, we must address the risks of abuse, violence, and femicide, which threaten the safety and wellbeing of our girls and women.

I also believe that we must do more, to ensure that the children of Europe are being raised as active contributors to their societies, and fully engaged in processes of democratic participation. Listening and responding to the needs and aspirations of our children is not optional; it is a cornerstone of our commitment to our future generations, and the success of our Union.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of migration, and how best to address it in respectful and dignified ways, continues to be a source of uncertainty within many of our countries.

There are also disturbing indicators that, in some of our nations, the rise in populist rhetoric is having a destabilising effect on our efforts, to achieve sustainable peace and inclusive prosperity.

We must admit that Europeans, from all walks of life and in all of our countries, are questioning the role and relevance of the institutions within the European Union.

However, I believe that such questioning is a healthy sign that our citizens are seriously engaging, as critical thinkers, on issues of direct importance to their communities and societies.

Some people believe that the Union and its institutions are too distant, while others express concern that it is too closely involved in the day-to-day business of their lives.

Some people are questioning the effectiveness of the European Union to improve their standards of living, while others question the very relevance of the Union, in today's rapidly-changing world.

Our responses to such challenges must take an immediate and sustainable perspective, to address short-, medium- and long-term concerns.

We must effectively address the risk of countries becoming disillusioned with the European project, by reaffirming our unity and solidarity.

Our responses must be rooted in a shared commitment towards the longstanding ideals of Europe, and the acknowledgement that when we stand together, our peoples are strong and enriched.

Our responses must, first and foremost, reaffirm our intrinsic commitment to uphold universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are the most powerful legacy of our European heritage.

Let me quote the words of Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which she shared in her Europe's Day message last year.

"The future of the European Union is a choice – a choice that belongs to every European citizen and matters to the entire world.

But the future of Europe is not something we inherit from our founding fathers and mothers. The European Union is the values we believe in, the partnerships we build in the world, the mirror of our European society. Europe is what we, Europeans, make of it – every single day, each one of us." End quote.

It is our responsibility, as active citizens, to create the kind of European Union that we wish to see in the world.

There is already much for us to take pride in. Europe is the largest single market on earth; it is the largest trading power; and it is the largest development and humanitarian aid donor that humanity has ever seen.

There is exciting potential for the growth and expansion of our Union, both in terms of its economic reach and its socio-cultural impact.

However, for these aspirations to be truly sustainable, we must be courageous.

We must accept that there is the urgent need for re-evaluation and reforms within our European institutions and instruments.

We must listen to the voices of our peoples and act upon their concerns, because it is clear that our old approaches and strategies are no longer as effective.

We must be bold and take practical steps forward, to ensure that our European family of nations is able to truly safeguard the dignity of each and every individual, who calls Europe their home.

Thank you for your attention, and I wish all of us a joyful Europe Day.