
*Speech Delivered By H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta,
on the occasion Of The National Day Of France, 14 July 2018*

Thank you, Your Excellency, for your kind words of welcome.

Please convey, in my name and on behalf of the Government and People of Malta, our sincere best wishes to His Excellency, President Emmanuel Macron and to the People of France, on the occasion of your National Day, the *Fête de la Federation*.

Let me begin by thanking President Macron, on behalf of the Maltese government, for facilitating the swift relocation of 51 migrants from Malta to France. We must continue to ensure that the dignity of all the people, who are seeking shelter and hope in Europe, is respected and promoted.

Excellency,

On this day, it is important for us to remember that the historical relationship between Malta and France is far older than the establishment of diplomatic relations between our countries.

There has always been a connection between our peoples, ever since the Normans arrived on the Maltese Islands during the Middle Ages.

The pervasive influence of French culture was further felt during the period of the Knights of St John, many of whom came from the regions of France, Provence, and Auvergne.

As we all know, Napoleon's arrival in Malta ended the reign of the Knights, and developed some of the legal, social, and economic realities of our islands.

Our mutual membership within the European Union has further sustained the close friendship between our countries.

I believe that our close friendship is built on our shared commitment to safeguard our European heritage, which is built upon a united spirit of solidarity and the responsibility to uphold universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This sense of solidarity was evident earlier this year, when the Prime Minister of my country, accompanied by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion, attended an important meeting on the future of Libya, hosted by His Excellency, President Macron.

On my most recent visit to Paris, which took place last year, I participated at the Global Meeting of the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society entitled ; "Engage for Impact: Daring to lead in a disrupted world"

This conference, emphasised the importance of achieving social and economic equality for people of all genders, in particular, by addressing the inequalities still faced by women, by finding new ways of working together, as well as renewing the recognition of the importance of women's leadership.

I believe that Malta and France are united by a shared focus on the ideals of our republics, which must continue to emphasise the equal inclusion of each and every member of our societies, across all areas of economic, political, social, and cultural life.

Also, for this reason, we must continue to strengthen the socio-economic links between our nations. Let us continue to encourage stronger trade and commercial ties, and greater closeness between the business communities of our respective countries.

Let me also take this opportunity to commend the efforts being made by the seven Maltese-French Associations, based in France, which are also nurturing essential person-to-person contact between our peoples.

In order to encourage such contact further, I believe that we must continue to promote and prioritise the areas of tourism and hospitality. Tourism is an ideal gateway for friendship-building, and the celebration of diversity.

It is therefore reassuring to note that there continues to be an upward trend in visitors from France, who are being welcomed to our Maltese Islands.

In fact, the total number of French tourists during the first four months of 2018 has increased by 23.1% when compared with the same period of last year.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank you, Ambassador, for your continuing support towards the work of my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, both in terms of your Embassy's collaboration, and your own personal participation in various events.

Such initiatives are evidence of the dedication we all feel, to nurture the wellbeing of our communities and our societies.

On concluding, let me also say that Malta's bid for observer status to the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* is another example of the desire for future closeness between our countries.

Malta's bid for observer status is motivated by the deep historical, linguistic, and social links that have been consolidated, over the centuries, between Malta and the French-speaking world.

It is the conviction of the Government of Malta, that Malta could make tangible contributions to the implementation of the inclusive values of the Francophonie.

Such values are at the heart of French culture, and are shared by all countries of goodwill.

As we all know, Malta is currently celebrating Valletta's term as the European Capital of Culture for 2018. Culture enriches a country, through the celebration of its heritage, while also helping to create spaces where diverse groups can come together in a spirit of inclusion and unity.

Your Excellency,

Let us raise our glasses and drink to the health of His Excellency, President Macron; to the prosperity of the people of Malta and France; and to the excellent friendship that exist between us.