



**Opening Statement by the Hon. Carmelo Abela,  
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion of Malta,  
for the meeting with  
the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence,  
and the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs**

Dublin – 20th February 2019

*Dear colleagues,*

I am grateful for the kind invitation you have extended to me to address this esteemed Committee on the occasion of my visit to Ireland. I wish to provide you with an updated résumé of the bilateral relations between my country - Malta, and Ireland, as well as to discuss issues of common interest at the bilateral and global levels, namely migration, the Middle East Peace Process, Libya, Syria, as well as Brexit and the Future of Europe.

## **Bilateral relations**

At the outset, I would like to underline that Malta and Ireland have enjoyed strong bilateral relations since the establishment of diplomatic ties on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1990.

Over the years, these ties have been strengthened by means of several agreements in various fields - such as air services and avoidance of double taxation - and through continued exchanges and high-level meetings, also within the framework of cooperation between our two Foreign Ministries.

I am also pleased to observe that, on Defence, both countries enjoy excellent, long-standing cooperation with regular contact. The Armed Forces of Malta personnel receive regular training at Irish military institutions, and Malta cooperates with Ireland in humanitarian search and aid.

I would also like to mention, in this connection, that thanks to the cooperation with Ireland the vessel LÉ Aoife - now renamed P62 - which is Malta's largest naval vessel, the Maltese Armed Forces have been better able to assist in the rescue of migrants that regularly encounter difficulties in Malta's search and rescue area.

Similarly, I am pleased to observe the ongoing post-graduate medical training being offered to Maltese health specialists, in collaboration with the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland. This is a highly prestigious undertaking, and Malta is very proud of this collaboration with Ireland.

I would, furthermore, like to take this opportunity to inform the esteemed Members of the two Committees that Malta and Ireland look forward to further amplify their mutual collaboration on a

multilateral level, reflecting the excellent bilateral interface nurtured over the years.

## **Migration**

Malta wholeheartedly welcomes the efforts of the Irish Government in supporting other EU Member States directly hit by large flows of irregular migrants, and in relocating asylum-seekers.

Frankly, we remain concerned about the lack of predictability that prevails before and after the process of disembarkation of migrants arriving by sea. We are disappointed to register that the EU has been unable to respond effectively to the irregular arrival of migrants along the Central Mediterranean route.

Were it not for an *ad hoc* solidarity procedure agreed every time by a coalition of willing EU Member States to relocate migrants, Member States in the region have been left guessing how the next case will

pan out. However, we could not continue with *ad hoc* arrangements all the time.

In view of the *status quo*, I am particularly grateful for Ireland's direct support in relocating migrants arriving in Malta on the *MV Lifeline* in June 2018 and, again, aboard the *Sea Watch-3* and the *Professor Albrecht Penck* in January.

## **MEPP**

The peace process in the Middle East has always been a subject close to heart in Malta's foreign policy. I reiterate Malta's longstanding position in favour of a two-State solution for the Middle East conflict, and the readiness of my country to support any initiative that aims to breathe new life, in concrete and tangible terms, into the peace process with the aim of advancing the prospects of peace through the revival of negotiations as soon as possible.

Malta also believes that the status of Jerusalem as a capital city must be mutually agreed upon through meaningful peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Any unilateral pronouncement to the contrary jeopardizes the prospects of peace in the region. In this regard, I wish to underline the importance of effective multilateralism and the role of the UN and its agencies in addressing this conflict that has been ongoing for over half a century. In this regard, Malta, together with the EU and its Member States, continues to support the excellent work of UNRWA and will strive to ensure sustainable, continued, and effective assistance to Palestinian refugees at this difficult juncture.

In this regard, we regret the US decision to cut financial aid to UNRWA and urge them to reconsider this decision. In this context, it is worth noting the efforts of both our countries to further support and sustain UNRWA in its endeavours.

Last year, Malta tripled its share of ODA funding to UNRWA, and this

year a substantial contribution has already been made prior to my visit here. I am also pleased to note that Ireland fares no less.

Indeed, with the Middle East Peace Process firmly consolidated as a priority of its foreign policy, I note with positive interest that Ireland has launched a new initiative – The Ireland-Palestine Scholarship Programme – which I look forward to learning more about.

I also firmly believe that the EU can play a significant role in the region. The Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process of July 2014 remain valid today. EU unity in this regard is crucial and we need to maintain the long-established EU position, particularly in relation to the four parameters.<sup>1</sup>

## **Libya**

---

<sup>1</sup> An agreement on the borders of the two states, based on 4 June 1967 lines with equivalent land swaps as may be agreed between the parties. The EU will recognize changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, only when agreed by the parties. Security arrangements that, for Palestinians, respect their sovereignty and show that the occupation is over; and, for Israelis, protect their security, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and deal effectively with security threats, including with new and vital threats in the region. A just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the refugee question. Fulfilment of the aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem. A way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both states.

The situation in Libya is another issue that is very dear to my country, given Malta's proximity and long-standing relations with Libya.

Malta continues to fully support the UN-led facilitation process based on the UN's recalibrated Action Plan on Libya. The overarching baseline remains that of a full commitment by the Libyans and the international community to the political process, and the renunciation of the military track. In follow-up to the Paris Summit of May 2018, Malta welcomes the conclusions adopted at Palermo to revitalise Libya's roadmap by all local and international stakeholders.

The need for a constitutional and legal framework before elections are held remains essential. The support of the international community is imperative to ensure that the necessary technical, legislative, and security conditions are in place prior to the holding of elections by spring 2019, the results of which would be acceptable for all.

Within this framework, Malta will continue to provide its unwavering support towards facilitating capacity-building measures in Libya and reiterates its support for the efforts of the United Nations, especially those of the Special Representative Ghassan Salamé, to this end.

## **Syria**

The escalation of violence in Syria continues to be a source of grave concern. There can be no military solution to this conflict. We condemn, in the strongest terms, the use of chemical weapons, which resulted in numerous casualties. This is unacceptable, and the international community has the responsibility to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable, calling for zero-impunity.

The Syrian conflict is causing heightened regional instability. Malta urges all regional players to exercise restraint and to pursue the path of political dialogue to re-establish peace and security in the region.

Malta supports the UN-lead reconciliation efforts via the Geneva process and the creation of a broadly representative Constitutional

Committee, in cooperation with the Astana Guarantors, which would be charged with drafting a new Constitution and laying the ground for the holding of democratic elections to be supervised by the UN.

Malta looks forward to participating in the upcoming Brussels III Conference on Syria, and to building on the work and outcome of the Brussels II Syria Conference of last year, which asserted the importance of establishing a lasting, fully-inclusive political settlement based on the Geneva Communiqué and on the full implementation of relevant UNSC Resolutions.

For too long - nine years to be precise - the Syrian people have toiled in the woes of this conflict. It is high time that we regenerate the discussion and take stock of the actions taken in the past to forge our present and future. We owe them this much.

**Brexit**

Malta fully respects the democratic decision taken by the UK, although we still find it difficult to come to terms with the fact that the UK will soon depart the EU.

Notwithstanding this decision, I reiterate Malta's stance that it will do its utmost to maintain a very close relationship with the UK. We do hope that the transition, whether through a deal or without one, will be as smooth as possible. Let me reiterate that the Maltese Government remains committed to the unity of the EU27 and reaffirms its support to Ireland on the Irish backstop.

## **Conclusion**

Once again, thank you for the opportunity you have so kindly given me to inform the Committee about some of Malta's bilateral relations with Ireland. I look forward to hearing your perspective on any of the issues I have presented, and to answering any questions that you may have.

Thank you