

THE HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF MALTA VISITS IMLI

The Honourable Dr. George Vella (Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malta) visited the IMO International Maritime Law Institute on 8 March 2017 and addressed the IMLI Class of 2016 – 2017 on the ‘Maritime Challenges during the Maltese Presidency of the EU Council.’



The Honourable Dr. George Vella (Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malta) and Professor Attard (Director, IMLI) with the IMLI Class of 2016 – 2017.

In introducing the Honourable Minister to the students, Professor Attard (Director, IMLI) expressed delight in welcoming the Honourable Minister to the Institute. He also expressed the Institute’s gratitude for the support the Minister and his Government continue to extend to the Institute.

In his address to the students, the Honourable Minister stated that it was a great pleasure for him to visit the Institute and share with the students his thoughts on contemporary issues relevant to their studies. He added that his Ministry and the Government of Malta recognises the relevance of IMLI and its mission to providing professional training to the students and by extension to their respective countries. He informed the Class that maritime affairs continue to play a dynamic role in the economic and social development of Malta.

The Honourable Minister's visit was seen by the students as a mark of Malta's hospitality and unflinching commitment and support to IMLI. They were highly honoured by his presence, and his address on topical issues relevant to their studies, from the EU perspective, was indeed enlightening.

Speaking with the editor of the IMLI e-News, shortly after his address, Minister Vella said that he was very impressed with the activities of IMLI. He said that IMLI's success is globally recognised and to that extent, he does not in any way find it difficult to talk about IMLI in international fora. He expressed admiration for the excellent leadership qualities of Professor Attard, whose dedication to the ideals of international maritime law has brought the Institute this far.

The address of the Honourable Minister is reproduced below:

Professor Attard
Dear Students
Ladies and Gentlemen

Professor Attard thank you for inviting me to the Institute.

It always gives me great pleasure to visit this Institute and to have the opportunity to meet and share with you and the students in IMLI's LL.M Programmes a few of my thoughts on a contemporary topic.

My Ministry, and indeed the Government of Malta, holds in high esteem the activities and the important role of IMLI in its mission to provide training and knowledge in a sector of such importance not only to you as future graduates but also to your countries.

For Malta, as an island nation, maritime affairs have throughout the years, or should I say since time immemorial, played a constant dynamic in its existence, its survival and in its economic and social development. At the national, regional and international levels Malta has been able to sustain its resilience and aspirations in the face of numerous challenges inherent in what is considered to be a very turbulent region, the region of the Mediterranean.

Throughout centuries, Malta has pursued its vocation as a guardian and as promoter of the Mediterranean dimension. With this in mind, during the present Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Malta is highlighting the Southern Neighbourhood of the EU, particularly as there will not be another Mediterranean country in the Presidency seat until the turn of Croatia in 2020.



The Honourable Dr. George Vella (Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malta) delivering his address.

As I had stated when I addressed the Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament a few weeks ago “The countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are dealing with serious crises, from socio-economic problems to violent conflicts, youth unemployment, radicalisation, damage to the environment and migration.” In this context, and for the first time, the Maltese Presidency will be organising a meeting at the end of next month (29 April 2017) bringing together in Malta, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the European Member States, the Southern Mediterranean Partners as well as those of the Arab States and those of the Gulf countries. This meeting will provide a forum for a debate on issues common to these countries including youth, inter-religious dialogue and culture and other soft security issues.

It therefore should not come as a surprise to you that at a time when Malta is currently holding the Presidency of the European Union’s Council of Ministers, the Maltese Presidency has identified the EU Integrated Maritime Policy as one of the six political priorities of its six-month work programme. Together with the other five priorities – Migration, the Single Market, Security, Social Inclusion, Europe’s Neighbourhood – Maritime Affairs is one of the critical links, which bind together the other inter-related priorities, which present us with challenges and opportunities.

It is an acknowledged fact that the EU will be increasingly dependent in the years to come on the seas and oceans. As such, the Maltese Presidency provides an appropriate platform and a good opportunity to further evaluate the economic potential of the seas and oceans (Blue Growth), as well as the legal aspects arising when it comes to administration and decisions about resources, maritime boundaries, etc. The sustainability and continuing development of the maritime sector,

under the EU Integrated Maritime Policy, fits naturally with the legislative priorities of an outward-looking island nation in the southern Mediterranean.

Malta is therefore looking to the sea, to ensure not only the sustainability of our oceans, and in particular the Mediterranean Sea which surrounds us, but also the challenge of an effective governance to promote growth in areas such as maritime tourism and freight by sea.

Some of the areas which present common challenges and opportunities and which the Maltese Presidency is focusing on as part of key topics which feature under 'Maritime Affairs' include:

- The expansion of the Blue Economy as part of the Blue Growth Initiative providing innovative research and commercial activities.
- The political endorsement on the way forward with respect to the effectiveness of the current international ocean governance framework (such as UNCLOS) in ensuring the sustainable use of oceans and how best to develop a more coherent, comprehensive and effective EU policy to improve this framework.
- The development of a Western Mediterranean Sea Basin Initiative in the context of blue growth with a view to improve maritime governance, exploit strengths and address weaknesses, whilst ensuring a sustainable approach.
- The provision of additional thrust to develop and conclude dossiers in relation to Nautical Tourism.
- The keeping of maritime transport high on the EU political agenda and to maintain an overarching guiding principle that shipping is a global industry regulated at a global level.
- The adaptation of education and training needs to the developments in innovative technology.
- The contribution towards strengthening the stable framework conditions for European quality shipping including ship safety and protection of human life at sea, the working and living conditions on board ships and the protection of health and safety of seafarers, among other areas.
- To work within international bodies to achieve a level playing-field and a fair working environment in maritime transport.



Professor Attard (Director, IMLI) presenting the gift to The Honourable Dr. George Vella (Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malta) on behalf of the IMLI Class of 2016 - 2017

Here, I must highlight that the detailed Joint Communication of 10 November 2016 of the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini set out an ambitious joint agenda for the future of our oceans, proposing 50 actions for safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed oceans in Europe and around the world. Not only, but the Joint Communication is an integral part of the EU's response to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular SDG 14 'to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.' Three important Malta rendezvous, which will serve to advance the debate and propose concrete actions on maritime affairs, are:

1. The High-Level Stakeholder and Ministerial Conference on Maritime and Road Safety – Addressing current/new challenges in EU Maritime Transport to take place in Malta on 28-27 March 2017;
2. The High-Level Conference on Blue Growth, Ocean Governance in the EU and the Mediterranean, Innovation, and Nautical Tourism to take place in Malta next month (20 April 2017) under the Maltese Presidency; and
3. The European Union 'Our Ocean' Conference in Malta on 5 and 6 October 2017 which aims to inspire and empower a new generation of leaders, entrepreneurs, scientists and civil society to identify solutions and commit to actions for safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed oceans.

I must not miss this opportunity to make a reference to the issue of Migration. I strongly believe that this issue is not only one of the priorities identified by the Maltese Presidency but has a prime relevance to what is happening in the Central Mediterranean. Indeed, Malta's twin objectives of including Migration in the six-month programme of the 2017 Maltese Presidency, are to push for the swift implementation of measures that have already been agreed upon at the Valletta Summit on Migration (11-12 November 2015) , the Valletta Summit of the European Council on the external aspects of migration: addressing the Central Mediterranean route (2 February 20217) and the 2017 Senior Officials Meeting (February 2017) of the Rabat Process and the Khartoum Process, and to ensure that the issue remains at the top of the political agenda.

Malta is totally and completely committed during its 2017 Presidency of the European Union Council, and even beyond, to work alongside other EU Member States, on the continuous development of the maritime sector also based on the fact that the European Commission has decided to focus this year (2017) on maritime issues within the field of transport.

One important and final comment which I would like to highlight is that Malta has adopted its "own, unique approach to the Presidency that reflects our response to the particular challenges of our time", including in the maritime sector. Indeed, the hub of activities being generated in this sector during the Maltese Presidency is in itself a testimony of the serious commitment of Malta to work closely together with its EU partners as well as other countries, in tackling the maritime agenda in a pro-active and holistic manner.

Our Presidency priorities were chosen to represent the interests and the concerns of the European Union citizens. Putting the maritime and the Mediterranean on the top of the agenda was rational and a logical consequence to our Maritime identity and future destiny.

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