

**XIV Information and Training Seminar Westin Hotel, Malta  
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**Welcome Address**

*Ambassador Alfred A. Zarb,  
Euro Med Coordinator, Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

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Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malta and the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies of Malta I would like to welcome you to Malta and to the 14<sup>th</sup> session of the Information and Training Seminars, held under the Political and Security Chapter of the Barcelona Declaration. Malta has hosted this biannual event since 1996. The seminar remains one of the first and most successful confidence building measures that have been adopted by the Barcelona Process.

This particular session was originally scheduled to take place two weeks ago but we were forced to change dates as they coincided with the holding of general elections in Malta. These elections were a historic moment for Malta. It was the last in a series of appointments with destiny that have come to mark our political history over the last half century, namely - the choice between independence and integration with Britain, the end of colonial rule, the achievement of Independence, the proclamation of the Republic. This time around we were called to decide upon Malta's accession to the European Union. It is customary on these special occasions for us to indulge in the full exercise of democratic expression. We recall our historic landmarks, and can go up to the edge of the cliff leaving no stone unturned. In the end the people's decision is held supreme. The election result empowered the new government to proceed with its programme and on 16<sup>th</sup> April the Prime Minister joined the leaders of the other accession countries and the member states, in Athens to sign the Treaty of Accession providing for Malta's membership of the European Union on 1 st May 2004.

We like to think that we are a fairly rare breed, belonging to Europe but with our very own Mediterranean characteristics. We make up a mosaic that is as contrasting as it is complementary.

We are Europeans in respect of our values, our culture, administrative procedures, the body of law, which derives from the napoleonic code, and the systems of governance. We are simultaneously Mediterranean - perhaps exclusively Mediterranean since our livelihood very much depends on the sea that surrounds us. Over the years our location attracted all the major powers that were in control of the Mediterranean. We have our own vernacular, which is of a Semitic origin as would be some of our architectural forms, In itself the language is a source of national identity. If for the most part our vocabulary is of Arabic origin, romance enables us to express our cultural heritage while accepted international terminology is used to express technical terms.

Europe and the Mediterranean traditionally and understandably feature predominantly among the central objectives of our foreign policy. In order to promote these objectives we are actively engaged in the Mediterranean Forum, the 5+5, CIMO, OSCE, CSCM, and of course the Euro Mediterranean process.

Learning from experience we try to steer a course that embraces this geopolitical reality - the wider Euro Mediterranean Space. The countries that we all represent will recall the stand that Malta took in 1972 to put the Mediterranean on the international agenda through its insistence on

the inclusion of a Mediterranean chapter in the Helsinki Final Act of the then CSCE. It is the primary reason that leads us to position ourselves in favor of continuity of dialogue. This has been our line within the Barcelona process and we hope to continue in this direction even as members of the European Union.

We believe in dialogue and maintain that a lack of dialogue will only bring more frustration and confrontation. We are therefore strong believers in the Barcelona process. Despite the fact that progress within the process is not too visible, the partnership remains the only framework that has managed to hold regular meetings at all levels including that of Ministers of Foreign Affairs notwithstanding the difficult moments that the region experiences on a fairly regular basis. If the process were to cease to exist we would have to create another one. How successful would we be is another matter! So we should keep the process going, improving it as we go along.

Our gathering here today is undoubtedly a special occasion. For the first time it brings together the members states of the European Union, the Mediterranean partners and the accession states. This seminar will give us the opportunity to look at the process against this new reality. Mathematically we have grown from a partnership of 15 Europeans and 12 Mediterranean partners to 25 Europeans and 10 Mediterranean partners. We also have to take into account the New Neighbourhood policy that the Union is proposing for countries on its periphery. How can we put all this together while at the same time maintain a relative balance among the participants?

For more than two years now our delegation has been calling for an adaptation of the mechanism of the process to take into consideration the changes that are taking place in the region. First of all it is necessary to instill a stronger sense of ownership among all the participants. This calls for a combination of involvement and commitment: involvement in all the levels of decision making and the commitment to realise agreed objectives. It is also important to work out a balance between the sub regions within the partnership. Chapter V of the VAP dealing with 'Institutional Provisions' calls for the examination of these and other changes that could be introduced.

These are trying times for the region and the process itself. Apart from the stalemate of the Middle East Peace Process and other political issues that are often present in the discussions among the partners, we have also the task to encounter the challenges of globalisation in an ever-changing scenario. We have recently inherited new challenges to contend with. These started off with the 11 September terrorist attacks. Account must also be taken of changes taking place in the Middle East down to the Gulf region.

We must rise above the temptation of those that rashly single out a particular race or religion for the perpetration of terrorist acts and other ills. We need to find the tools that will enable us to turn the tide. We need to discover the role that diplomacy should be able to play in harnessing the new concepts of international relations.

The Barcelona process is meant to establish a comprehensive partnership between the European Union and its Mediterranean neighbours. In order to succeed this partnership would require each partner to understand the concerns, while accepting the customs and traditions, of the other. At the same time we should ensure that our individual characteristics would enable us to seek convergence of our positions. We should aim for the collective identification of the common ground on which to build the future. In these particular times we should make of the new Euro Mediterranean process a credible institution and a source of understanding and cooperation in order to fulfil the common aspirations of our peoples.