

*Intervention by the Hon. Dr. Michael Frendo, Parliamentary Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Investment Promotion at the Euro-Mediterranean Training and Information Seminar for Diplomats
The Westin Dragonara Resort, 23rd April 2004*

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a pleasure for me to welcome you to Malta and to share with you a few of my thoughts on our region just a few days before the historic enlargement of the European Union and the consequent enlargement of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership under whose auspices you are meeting here today.

This session comes also on the eve of the mid-term Ministerial Conference of the Partnership that will be held in Dublin under the current Irish Presidency and I am sure that your deliberations here will mirror, to a certain extent, the discussion we will be having there.

From a national perspective I cannot but stress our commitment, as members of the European Union, to keep the Mediterranean high on the agenda of the Union. During the past few months, in our role as active observers, we have endeavoured to contribute to the Union's initiatives vis-a-vis the region - and here I am specifically referring to the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East - and we aim to intensify and enhance this contribution in line with the importance we attach to the region in our own foreign policy agenda.

Distinguished Participants,

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership does not, regretfully, enjoy a high media profile. If one were to conduct an opinion poll across the 35 countries forming the Partnership I would venture to say that few would be in a position to state that they are informed, or at least aware, of the overarching aims of this process. This may give the impression that very little is being achieved whereas substantial progress has been made, especially in the economic and financial and in the social, human and cultural partnerships. The Naples (Barcelona VI) Ministerial Conference was able to endorse and/or welcome three very important decisions, namely:

- the setting up of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, that has since held its first plenary meeting in Athens last month;
- the setting up of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for a Dialogue on Cultures;
- the strengthening of FEMIP.

The three institutions represent significant progress in all three partnerships. The Parliamentary Assembly should bring the political process closer to the people of the region by utilising the contact members of parliament have with their constituents. Besides offering

valuable input to the intergovernmental process in its consultative capacity, the Assembly will also offer another avenue for our society to express its hopes and aspirations for the region.

The Foundation will address a pressing need. It will aim to bring about mutual understanding of the different cultures in the region. For too long have divisions and differences been the characteristic of the Mediterranean and this situation has led to phenomena such as terrorism, racism and xenophobia. The foundation will be successful in its endeavours if it targets the grass roots of society. Academic debate, whilst useful in its own right, will, not be enough to overcome the deep-rooted suspicions that dominate intercultural relations in our region. It was a wise decision to structure the mechanism of the foundation on a network of networks basis since one would assume that, in this way, its activities would involve as many layers of society as possible. It is now up to each of our individual national networks to engage themselves in the foundation's activities and strive to transfer the benefits to the general population.

On the economic front the set of Association Agreements is now nearly complete, the Agadir agreement envisaging free trade between four Mediterranean partners has been signed and Ministers of Finance have endorsed a decision to strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean Facility for Investment and Partnership (FEMIP). All this bodes well for the future but we have to ensure that the economic benefits deriving from these positive developments eventually filters down to the citizens through the creation of jobs especially in favour of the younger generations.

The current situation can and should be improved through two major initiatives to which I have already made a passing reference, namely the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The starting point of any discussion on these initiatives must necessarily be, in my opinion, the fact that the Barcelona Process will still remain the principal framework for the Union's relationship with the Mediterranean partners. These initiatives are aimed at strengthening this relationship and, at the same time, strengthening also the Union's relationship with its other immediate neighbours.

The European Neighbourhood Policy can be considered as the next logical step in the Union's relationship with its neighbours. Having concluded an Association Agreement but not in a position to apply for membership, the policy aims to create a 'circle of friends' around the Union's expanded borders. In my view the policy should strive to be as inclusive as possible in terms of the area it aims to encompass as well as in terms of content albeit flexible enough to accommodate the differing needs of partners. The end result must be the same - the approximation of the individual

partners' legislation to that of the Union so as to enable them to be integrated as much as possible naturally without participation in the institutions. This integration would also include participation in the Single Market with the consequent benefits that such participation offers, benefits already enjoyed by the present members of the European Economic Space. Israel and the Palestinian Authority should be the subject of special focus since this would enable the Union to strengthen its influence in the development of the region.

In the context of this Neighbourhood Policy, I make reference to one of our neighbouring countries, Libya - a country with one of the longest coastlines on the Mediterranean. Malta would welcome the engagement of Libya in the Barcelona process. The signs for this to happen are encouraging and we hope that the necessary steps are taken for this to occur.

Mr. Chairman,

As outlined in the "Interim Report on a Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East", prepared by the Presidency and the Secretary General/High Representative, the European Union's overall engagement in the region must not be seen in isolation but should be underpinned by a series of overarching objectives and principles. Partnership is the key to the promotion of a common zone of peace, prosperity and progress. This requires a long term and sustained engagement as well as the strengthening of the Union's political dialogue with the region through which sensitive issues such as human rights, the rule of law, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction can be discussed. This dialogue could also be extended to security matters within the framework of ESDP.

The same report rightly points out that to be successful, the strategic partnership must be endowed with a 'sense of ownership'. This requires extensive consultations with all the players in the region - governments, regional organisations and civil society - highlighting the role each party has to play. In addition it must also include a strong

commitment to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the re-iteration of the important role that the Union has to play in this regard.

Distinguished Participants,

I would like to conclude my intervention today by thanking the organisers - the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies and the European Commission who, in collaboration with my Ministry, strive to make these sessions as useful and informative as possible for the benefit of participants and also for the benefit of the Process bearing in mind that this is a prime example of a successful Partnership Building Measures. Having reached the 16th edition is a milestone that must not go unnoticed and I am sure that organisers would wish to continue building on the success achieved so far.

Thank You.