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*Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta at the launch of a publication entitled “Encounters with Valletta: a Baroque City through the Ages”, 25 June 2018*

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Distinguished guests,  
Dear friends,

It is my pleasure to share some brief remarks with you, at the launch of this remarkable publication.

“Encounters with Valletta: a Baroque City through the Ages” is not simply a book. It is a project, which represents a ground-breaking contribution to academic research about our capital city.

Before I indulge further into my brief contribution, to the launch of this unique book, I would like to thank, whole-heartedly, Mr Michael Bianchi, for his invaluable vision and dedication, to make this project a reality.

When Michael first mentioned the book to me, about three and a half years ago, although I understood the importance of this project, it was only when I leafed through the first copy that I realised what an immense contribution this is, to our historical heritage.

This publication is truly befitting our unique capital city, in the heart of the beautiful Mediterranean region.

This city, which has withstood the test of time and survived so many global challenges, and which Disraeli described as “a city built by gentlemen for gentleman” (although this might sound quite sexist in today’s parlance!), is a strong symbol of our culture and history.

It is especially fitting that this publication has been completed during Valletta’s term as European Capital of Culture for 2018.

Thank you, Michael, for this historical legacy, which you are leaving to our future generations.

I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the editors of this book, Justice Giovanni Bonello and Professor Denis de Lucca, and Doctor Petra Caruana Dingli, for her dedicated efforts to coordinate this project.

I must also like to congratulate the expert and academic contributors for their essential support, and the photographic work of Daniel Cilia, which brings this historical city to life.

Let me also commend the International Institute for Baroque Studies, at the University of Malta, for being so committed to this project, to give further visibility to Valletta.

I must also take this opportunity to acknowledge the support, given to this publication, by Dragonara Gaming Limited, and their decision to include this initiative within their corporate social responsibility endeavours. This is a reflection of their commitment to promote and to invest in our precious national heritage.

It is wonderful to note that all the proceeds from the sale of this publication will contribute towards cancer research. The contributions from this publication, towards cancer research, will be of immense benefit for the many individuals and families who are struggling with such conditions in the Maltese Islands and beyond.

As we all know, Valletta may be the smallest capital city, in terms of size, in the European Union. However, the historical, cultural, and political legacy of Valletta is enormous.

Furthermore, Malta's geo-strategic position at the crossroads of the Mediterranean has made it a natural bridge between continents and cultures, for centuries.

Our unique history has moulded us into a people with a diverse culture, including the best elements of our European and Semitic ancestors. Malta's unique culture is a proud representative of how all of these diverse elements can successfully co-exist, in a harmonious spirit of peace.

Since the time of our foremothers and forefathers, the Maltese have always found ways of sharing this spirit of friendship and peace.

It is for this reason that Valletta's term as European Capital of Culture is so important.

It is a reminder of the strength of our national identity, and our dedication to pursue peace within our communities and societies.

It is a reminder of the underlying transformation that culture makes possible, to form connections and to strengthen friendships, which transcend borders.

It is a reminder that we must find innovative ways to bridge our differences, and to create an enriching experience for all the inhabitants of our islands.

Just as Valletta was one of the first truly cosmopolitan and international cities, hosting knights from all over Europe within its walls, our country has now become international in its vision.

We are reaching out to connect with our Mediterranean and European neighbours, and beyond, by exporting Maltese talent, innovation, and research.

When we acknowledge, respect, and promote the strength of our culture, and its diverse roots, we are making a real investment in the values which define us as people of goodwill.

Namely, we are celebrating the fundamental importance of justice; of solidarity; and of peace.

On concluding, let me once again congratulate Michael; Dr Petra Caruana Dingli and her editorial colleagues; and all the collaborators who have made the publication of this magnificent book possible.

I augur that this publication will be a trusted reference point for all the students, researchers, visitors, and members of the general public, who wish to deepen their knowledge about our capital city, and to gain a richer awareness about our identity, as the people of Malta.

Thank you for your attention.