

**Speech by His Excellency George Vella, President of Malta on the occasion
of the Exchange of New Year Greetings**

Sant'Anton Palace

16 January 2020

Distinguished Guests,

Mr Bencini thank you for your speech.

It is a pleasure for me to address you for the first time as President of Malta, in this traditional exchange of greetings for the New Year.

This is also a very good opportunity to celebrate together the commitment you have shown to your duties over the past year. In this regard, I want to start by thanking you for the work you have carried out, which even though at times is not visible, is very important for our country.

I have always sustained this, even in my past position as Minister for Foreign Affairs.

As already mentioned by Mr Bencini, the last few months of the year that just ended, were not the smoothest. Our country has gone through an unprecedented situation that shocked our country's institutions and society.

We all regret the negative effects that these events have brought along with them, even on the international level. Our country's name has been stained and as a consequence, even our credibility has taken a downward turn.

Our country, however, does not deserve this.

In my position as President, I have worked within the parameters accorded to me by the Constitution to address the ongoing circumstances. National unity is the strongest weapon that the Maltese population has at its disposal.

As a new Prime Minister has just been appointed, we have the obligation to strengthen further our work in order to cleanse our country's name. We all know that Malta, notwithstanding its small size, has a lot to offer.

The history, culture, traditions, hospitality of its people, as well as its geographical position, makes it the envy of many.

In this regard, your assistance and work is essential in order to erase this negative trend and restore the respect, the honour and the credit that Malta deserves. Your role of Honorary Consuls will enable you to do so.

You are a vital link to deliver a message of good will to the countries that you represent. I urge you to use your reports to the respective capitals to inform that Malta is determined to strengthen its regulatory institutions and to continue to offer a welcoming environment for business and investment, especially in emerging and innovative areas.

Thanks to your valued assistance, we will continue promoting Malta's interests in various sectors such as tourism and the teaching of the English language, the maritime domain, aviation and pharmaceuticals, sectors for which we are much renowned and sought for.

We must continue to invest in the innovative areas that Malta has established itself in, but also in new ventures that you believe can flourish in Malta. Thanks to your fundamental role, Malta has the opportunity to become a creative innovation hub that attracts the best brains, whilst giving an opportunity to our workers, especially young people, to develop their abilities in our own country.

I firmly believe that as Honorary Consuls, you are a bridge that facilitates the exchanges between peoples and cultures. As was well mentioned by Mr

Bencini, in the globalised world we live in today, Malta, like other countries, is increasingly multicultural.

Hence, with your valid assistance, we can continue to see that the interests of all foreign citizens living, working, studying and contributing to the economic success that Malta is currently experiencing, are safeguarded. At the same time, as Honorary Consuls, you have a very important role to educate and inform these people of their legal obligations and rights, as soon as they start living in Malta.

In the same vein, you are also a means of linking Malta and the various capitals you work with. These contacts are essential in order to strengthen people-to-people contacts.

While at political and technical level, various treaties and agreements are concluded, it is direct contact with people that determines much of the success of the links between countries. The Honorary Consul is often a very first contact, and remains a point of reference throughout his career.

In the context of what is happening in our region at present, yours is a key role.

Over the past fifty-five years, Malta served as an interlocutor and a driver for peace. Malta has always sustained that peace in the Mediterranean and adjacent regions, is a guarantee of peace in the world.

The present situation is far from positive.

In the last week, we have seen how the tension in Libya has increased. There does not seem to be hope of an end to the conflict in Syria in the near future. The humanitarian situation in Yemen is increasingly degenerating and we are witnessing an escalation between Iran and the United States of America.

It is upsetting to see that against this international backdrop, the European Union is not showing the unity and the leadership expected from it. It is imperative that this state of affairs is changed.

It is therefore all the more pressing that the Consular Corps continues to give its essential contribution in fostering unity between peoples and to increase trust

between the two respective countries at the consular, political, economic and commercial levels.

You are part of a chain that strengthens the wellbeing of the society we live in, as well as the enhancement of relations between countries.

For the New Year, it is my wish to continue working together with all of you for this purpose. Every country has something to offer and I believe that with your valuable assistance, our country will be able to enjoy the fruit of your work.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank you for your kind words regarding the Malta Community Chest Fund Foundation. I take this opportunity to extend an invitation to each and every one of you, and also collectively as a Corps, to take a more active part in the various activities that the Presidency organises together with the Malta Community Chest Fund Foundation during the year.

On behalf of my wife Miriam, I wish you a Prosperous New Year, full of opportunities geared at strengthening an everlasting friendship between Malta and the countries that you are representing.

Thank You.