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Speech by H.E. George Vella, President of Malta during the Malta Chamber's Annual General Meeting

President
Deputy President
Vice Presidents
Members of the Chamber

I am really thankful for this opportunity to address you, even if virtually, during this Annual General Meeting.

I would rather have shared my message with you in person, as I had the opportunity to do last August when the Chamber launched the discussion 'Heading beyond Covid-19'.

Even though by then we had only experienced Covid for five months, we had already accumulated enough, knowledge to be cautious, and prepare ourselves for any eventuality, be it for the better or worse.

Seven months later we are still in the throes of the pandemic, and have had to adapt our lives and our lifestyles, while making the best use of available technology to avoid everything coming to a grinding halt.

As in every organisation or association, every Annual General Meeting is an important event.

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Yours today, is one such occasion, where I am sure you will be expressing satisfaction at the results obtained based on your collective vision, studied approaches, impartial and unbiased forecasts, and above all incessant drive.

I say this with confidence, because I have been able to observe first-hand, how, despite the never-ending odds, and an unfolding dramatic scenario – the Chamber not only performed, but performed very well.

My words are not merely superficial compliments to mark this occasion.

I do not hesitate to say that during these difficult times the Chamber has been an example of how an organisation, ably led by a determined team, following a sound, fact-based, no-nonsense strategy, could keep organisations and institutions afloat, even in worst of stormy weathers.

I believe a quality leap has been made, and standards have been set, when right in the middle of an unprecedented, long drawn crises that affected our country these past months, and which unfortunately is still very much with us, the

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Chamber took courageous leadership positions and spoke up, published reports, shared its assessments and advice, and acted as a beacon for Maltese businesses trying to find their way in uncharted waters.

Your obvious common target this year, was the mitigation of the negative impacts, COVID-19 was having on your members– businesses covering different aspects of the wide range of commercial activity in our country.

This was certainly no mean feat, especially when one considers that one was dealing with a scenario we had not ever experienced before in living memory; the fact that up to two months ago we did not even have the solace of an available vaccine; the fact that this was really and truly a pandemic; and that daily reports continued to alarm us as to what we could expect in the coming weeks and months. The only constant in the whole was your sense of duty towards your members, your pragmatic approach and cooperation with the responsible authorities, and a determination to overcome or prevent further damage.

You have shown beyond any shadow of doubt that you are perfectly placed to read the pulse of the business community out there, and in return enjoy the trust of the same business community.

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Every time you commissioned a study or a report such as those relating to Good Governance, the Economic Vision, Public Procurement and the National Budget Process, you have managed to produce a comprehensive and realistic picture of the situation; authoritative material sound enough to build policies and strategies upon.

I myself could verify this, when I addressed a most interesting event on ‘Heading Beyond COVID 19’, in August of last year, an event I already alluded to in my introduction.

On that occasion I commended all those involved – CEOs, experts and enterprises for the scientific and fact-based, very well-researched scenarios and options that emerged.

This approach gives the Chamber loads of credibility. It attracts attention, and makes its voice more authoritative.

One other aspect in which I consider the Chamber to have been very successful this past year is communication.

In a scenario where uncertainty and fear of the unknown were haunting the business community as much, if not more, than the general population, the

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Chamber reached out not only to its members, but also to the general public with constant reassurances, that were timely, factual, and balanced. The Chamber showed that it was constantly on the ball, reacting as fast as possible to developments, and taking early action whenever circumstances permitted.

Dear Members,

The business and commercial community cannot be seen as a static, detached component of our society.

It is a living, dynamic contributor to our daily well-being and quality of life. It is the essence of our economy and the basis of our financial wellbeing as a nation. Much depends on the health or otherwise of our commercial activity as a country. So does social stability, social justice, and employment policies.

Your role in our community goes well beyond mere commercial statistics, and I believe that over the years great progress has been made in making the commercial, entrepreneurial, profit-seeking drive more humane and conscious of its corporate social responsibilities.

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COVID-19 was a stark reminder of the need to keep these aspects firmly in our sights. It has taught all of us where our priorities should lie, and made us adopt a new set of parameters when deciding on what really matters in life.

As happened with the outgoing Council members, I sincerely hope that the incoming members will take up the baton and carry on with the work to secure continuity, by securing stability, sustainability, and growth in the best interest of our society and upcoming generations.

I wish to conclude by formally expressing my appreciation to the outstanding work done by the outgoing Council and Presidency.

Thank you for the close cooperation and the support you gave me and my Office during these difficult months.

Our collaboration was very gratifying.

I welcome the new team and assure them of the willingness of my Office to continue building on the many productive and rewarding contacts we have had so far, while expressing very cautious hopes that we see better times on the horizon the soonest possible.

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Thank you.