

Prime Minister's address to the Diplomatic Corps

Excellencies,

I am delighted to welcome you to the Auberge de Castille for today's traditional exchange of New Year's Greetings. The first in two years since the pandemic stopped us from having such meetings. Allow me, in the first new year of this legislature, to begin by wishing you, your loved ones, and the countries you represent all the very best for 2023.

Dialogue and exchange are at the heart of diplomacy. And I would like to express my gratitude to you all, as well as to our Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade, for your determination to ensure that our engagement is deepened and consolidated. I thank you for doing so resolutely, even during the difficult and trying time where the pandemic fundamentally reshaped how this is done.

Looking back on the past year in Malta, the focus shifted from responding to the pandemic, to managing our recovery from it. Restrictions were lifted and our societies returned to some sense of normality. In 2022, you saw the people of Malta exercising their democratic right in a free and fair election. As the people's choice, my government is committed to work in earnest to meet the aspirations of all Maltese citizens for a better future. A future that is sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive.

To meet these significant expectations, we persevered with reforms to strengthen accountability, transparency, and good governance. To strengthen our country's

democratic institutions, to guarantee that they are fit for purpose for the times we are living in. In June, the Financial Action Task Force recognised the major reforms that have been implemented and confirmed Malta to be a just and strong jurisdiction.

Malta's economy is one of the most vibrant in the European Union, registering among the highest economic growth, lowest unemployment, and inflation rates. My government is committed to fostering these conditions towards sustainable economic growth that can benefit each single member of our society. It was these favourable conditions that allowed us to take bold and decisive action to shoulder the burden of increasing energy prices.

However, sustainable prosperity also means taking tangible action to improve quality of life and enhance human dignity. I am particularly proud that my government has taken bold steps to this end by introducing the new IVF law, the concept of femicide into Maltese criminal law and the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code on the protection of the mother's health and life during pregnancy. Unprecedented investment in new open spaces for families to enjoy, has already started and in the next few days, further announcements will be made. In 2023, we will take this work forward, and we will even scale it up.

Excellencies,

2022 was also a year for lessons learned from the pandemic. From people travelling across countries, to the openness of our economies and to global value chains, we began to truly understand the full scale of the interface between the

national, the European and the global. We learned that we are indeed stronger and more effective when we work together, towards our common goals and interests.

A lesson that remains particularly relevant is the way in which the European Union responded to rising energy prices over the past months. I hereby welcome the EU-wide agreement on the gas price cap reached a few weeks ago as it will be key to ensuring that the situation experienced across Europe last summer does not repeat itself. We also learned the importance of shoring up our alliances through trade.

I must say that for us, rather than just being a lesson, it was also about driving the message home. Strengthening our trade links provides true value added for our citizens, for our businesses and for our resilience, not least in terms of ensuring secure supply chains. Ultimately, trade has the potential to create new growth and jobs, but we need to work together to tap this potential. This is why I have entrusted the Minister for Foreign and European Affairs with the overall responsibility for Trade, and I am pleased to see him investing efforts in this important area, as is demonstrated by next week`s planned trade mission to Ghana.

At an EU level, the finalisation of the FTA negotiations with New Zealand is a much-needed breath of fresh air - and we would hope to keep up the momentum and see this agreement, together with the agreements with Chile, Mexico and Mercosur, signed, concluded and most importantly implemented quickly. There are also positive signals, in particular on Chile, which are most welcome. India also represents an important opportunity. An ambitious FTA with India would have significant potential. An ambitious agreement is as much in India`s interest

is it is in the EU's. The progress in negotiations with Australia is also encouraging and we hope that these efforts can bear fruit in the near future.

From a bilateral perspective, commercial diplomacy is central to Malta's efforts overseas as we aim to continue exploring opportunities for engagement with international partners. Our cultural diplomacy strategy launched last year, will also support these efforts, by means of numerous and various projects that promote our cultural identity and enable understanding and cooperation with our international partners.

Excellencies.

2022 will also be remembered as the year that war returned to the European continent. This has profoundly impacted what we knew to be the international order. From food, to energy, to disinformation, it brought with it spill over effects that are not only considerable because of their gravity, but also because of their broad reach. Here too, the European Union showed strong unity of action, in cooperation with our international partners. Unity in showing solidarity with Ukraine. Unity in showing unwavering support for its territorial integrity and sovereignty. And unity in welcoming those seeking refuge. Malta will continue supporting the needs of the people of Ukraine in the ways that we can.

As a neutral country, Malta's main objective is to seek, restore and maintain peace. This is an active neutrality that upholds the principles of the UN Charter. It is only through peace that our societies can enjoy prosperity and progress. The events of February 2022 and all we have witnessed since then, are a stark

reminder that peace cannot and must not be taken for granted. A stark reminder that peace and stability need to be nurtured.

I mentioned earlier that dialogue is at the heart of diplomacy. And this is one way to do it. I am under no false pretence that there is some quick or easy solution. Or that there will be no disagreements. Far from it. But it remains up to each and every one of our countries to be courageous and bold enough to strive for peace, and to voice our concern when peace is threatened. It is this spirit that we take with us as we start our term as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council. This is our opportunity to contribute to safeguarding the values and principles of the UN charter at a time when they are most at risk. Our commitment in this sense remains clear.

Excellencies.

The Government of Malta, through the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade is committed to continue strengthening its bilateral ties and contacts, whilst exploring further avenues for collaboration. Malta's links with the UK, USA, Canada and Australia are strongly interlinked with the history of the Maltese people. Our relations, both at a bilateral and multilateral level, have been thriving and we will keep nurturing them furthermore. We have also pursued the implementation of Malta's Africa Strategy 2020 – 2025 with a view to deepening our cooperation with African partners and exploring new opportunities of mutual benefit.

I am also delighted to recall the opening of the Maltese Embassy in Brasilia. This is a clear demonstration of our interest and commitment to expanding Malta's

diplomatic presence in Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to this, we strengthened our presence overseas by bolstering our consular network further with the opening of more Consulates in strategic cities including new ones in Casablanca, Morocco; Accra, Ghana; and Doha, Qatar.

Excellencies.

It would be amiss if I did not refer to the Mediterranean: a neighbourhood we share with many of you here today. Our vision for the Mediterranean is of a stable, peaceful, prosperous space. A space where both shores work very closely, as equals, towards this aim. The willingness is there. The resources are there. We need to make sure that these are channelled to action on common interests and priorities: like climate, energy, peace and security, or migration. We owe this to all those that call the Mediterranean their home.

But the Mediterranean is also the European Union. And for us Southern EU Countries, our geography – the Mediterranean Sea – and our membership of the European Union, bring us together. Therefore, it is in our common interest to foster further cooperation that unites us. It is my great honour to be hosting the next Summit of the Southern Countries of the European Union in Malta later this year. This is a particularly special moment as it will be the 10th Summit of its kind, together with the relevant ministerial meetings taking place throughout the year. Malta will also be hosting the Small Nations Games and I look forward to welcoming your athletes to our country, in a spirit of respect, friendship and sportsmanship.

Excellencies.

I referred to climate change when I spoke of the Mediterranean. But in reality, this remains one of the most defining, and deeply disruptive global phenomena we are experiencing today. It is an existential threat, and one that Small Island States in particular are all too aware of. Throughout our tenure on the UN Security Council, drawing attention to the interlinkages between climate and security will be one of our priorities. Climate action must be joint action. The Islands for Islands initiative, which I launched at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, was created to serve as a platform for small island economies to share our realities as we work towards fulfilling the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, by achieving our decarbonisation and digitalisation targets. We aim to continue this work and stand ready to share best practice, particularly on our expertise in water management. As I announced at COP 27 in Egypt, we also intend to double our contribution to the International Climate Fund.

Excellencies.

In 2023, let us promise to keep in mind that the success of our response to regional and global challenges relies heavily on our dialogue and cooperation. We are stronger together. You have my word that Malta will remain an honest and reliable partner as we continue in our efforts to seek peace, security and prosperity in Europe, North Africa, and beyond. I look forward, your Excellencies, to enhancing our cooperation on shared priorities as we explore new areas for collaboration.

Is-sena t-tajba.