
*Opening Remarks delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of
Malta, at the JEF European Congress 2017*

10th November 2017

**Hon. Dr. Grima, Parliamentary Secretary for Youths, Sports and Voluntary Organisations,
Mr. Paul Bugeja, CEO of Malta Tourism Authority,
Distinguished guests,
Dear friends,**

It is my pleasure to speak at the opening of the JEF European Congress, 2017. I must also say I am glad that you have chosen to hold this Annual General Meeting in Malta, for the first time.

Let me begin my remarks by congratulating the team at JEF Malta, for all their work to facilitate this congress, in collaboration with the team at JEF Europe, who have produced an interesting agenda for the coming days.

Malta is well placed for such an event, as it is world renowned for its geo-strategic location, in the centre of the Mediterranean sea.

I also believe that Malta has all the potential to be a bridge builder, for peace, between the global North and South within the Euro-Mediterranean Region.

I am pleased that this European Congress is bringing together young people from across Europe, to focus on various areas of importance to our European family of nations.

This event is catalyst, to build further interconnectedness, for our national and European authorities, as well as our communities and societies.

The truth is that, in today's world, we must accept that our interconnections should go far deeper than our economies. These connections should also be active across the political, social, and ecological spheres of our countries and regions.

Whoever we are, wherever we are positioned, and whatever we do, we cannot escape the reality that we are connected.

As sources of healthy development in one part of our economic, social, and ecological systems can have great benefits, which effect our societies and our world

as a whole likewise, injustice, discrimination, and oppression, damage global development in many parts of the world, and subsequently, destabilise all efforts to achieve the sustainable advancement of humanity.

Let me therefore encourage you, as young people who are focused on the growth of our European identity, to promote strategies to strengthen positive interconnections.

We must prioritise such strategies for interconnectedness, between our different communities and nations, so as to lead to increased opportunities, for the benefit of all humanity.

Such opportunities include knowledge sharing and investment; research and innovation; international protection and security; and person-to-person relationship building, through education, trade, and tourism.

In this way, by nurturing the proper transformation to build and foster relationships and friendships, among the peoples of our nations, we shall come closer to achieving practical changes, that will be of particular benefit to the most vulnerable members of our communities and our societies at large.

These very same objectives are fully endorsed, and supported, by all the leaders of our nations through the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

Agenda 2030 provides an effective framework, and a practical action plan, for the sustainable future of our societies and our world.

Agenda 2030 acknowledges that first and foremost, the most important change which we must make, is to create a more equitable and fair system for the distribution of wealth.

For this reason, the very first Sustainable Development Goal targets the eradication of poverty.

This is the most basic inequality, which we must address, in order to achieve a deep-rooted social, economic, political, cultural, and ecological transformation of our global situation.

Poverty demeans human dignity, and perpetuates cycles of precarity, which many a time spins out of control, and inflicts damaging consequences across multiple generations.

There can be no peace and prosperity for humanity and our world, if systematic injustices continue to be perpetuated, through our political institutions and socio-economic structures.

So long as a disproportionate share of the world's resources are not being enjoyed by all, there shall be no equitable distribution, which translates into sustainable development for all humanity.

Let us not forget that poverty also exists within our European Union. In fact, Eurostat data tells us that 1 in 4 of the people in the European population are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Being at such risk means that even the smallest change in a person's life can result in severe poverty or material deprivation.

For this reason, we must remember that all of our nations are signatories to the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and therefore, we are all responsible to implement its goals and targets, in the best interest of our European family of nations and all humanity.

We cannot continue to drag our feet, or to be complacent about our social situation in Europe and the world.

We must work across the borders of our nations, to implement a shared vision of solidarity, equity, and inclusion.

This is why I am convinced that, the economic strengthening of our countries must be paralleled by increased attention to strategies that ensure sustainable improvements in everybody's daily life.

The development that I aspire for us to achieve, within Europe and beyond, is the development of the social, economic, and political wellbeing of every individual, of every family, and of all the communities within our societies.

Let me conclude by once again congratulating JEF Malta and JEF Europe for the work that you are doing, to bring the message of solidarity, which is at the heart of our European family of nations, to young people, while also creating safe and respectful spaces for discussion and sharing.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to exploring the outcomes of this Congress.