

European Defence Roundtable Malta, April 25 2017

Speech by the President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca at the European Defence Round table organised by Women Political Leaders Global Forum and Munich Security Conference in collaboration with the Office of the President

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It is my pleasure to address this roundtable organised by Women Political Leaders Global Forum in collaboration with Munich Security Conference and facilitated by my office, concerning the priority areas of European security and defence.

For many of the individuals, families, and communities who contribute to the vitality of our international family, challenges of security and defence have never been more pressing.

The global uncertainty which surrounds us has direct impact on our own lives, has made it imperative that we come together to formulate holistic and long-term strategies.

For this reason, let me begin by reasserting one fundamental truth.

We are stronger, safer, and more well equipped to deal with our present situation in a sustainable way when we work together, united as nations, as regions, and as one world.

The time for abstract debates or theorising is long since past. We must continue to endeavour to take practical action. We must continue to work together, in a spirit of transparency and solidarity.

Let us carefully analyse the need for such solidarity, particularly within Europe, in light of last year's EU Global Strategy Implementation Plan on Security and Defence, which forms part of a wider package including the Commission's European Defence Action Plan and the follow-up of the Joint Declaration signed by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of NATO.

Through the successful implementation of these strategies, we shall not only enable our European Union to respond more comprehensively to the risks faced by our Union, but we shall also enhance the defence capacities of our partners and collaborators.

By working in an integrated manner on a harmonised internal and external security agenda, we shall strengthen our collective ability to protect European citizens.

We must strengthen our commitment to all those who recognise this Union as a place of peace and of wellbeing.

We all share a common responsibility to ensure that our world is safeguarded from harm. This has never been more important than at the present moment, when so much is at stake.

Our way of life, as democratic nations under the rule of law, cannot be taken for granted. It must be protected and cherished, recognised as the legacy of our ancestors, and held up as an example of success and pride to our future generations.

We all share one united responsibility to effectively defend the social, cultural, economic, and environmental interests of the diverse individuals, families, and communities who make up the societies of our nations.

No matter what strategy or action plan we consider, I believe that the importance of security comes part-and-parcel with the intrinsic importance of human dignity.

The dignity of the human person must rest at the heart of our actions, moving forward to ensure greater security within our world.

No other considerations can be more sacred to us than a basic respect for universal human rights, and no justification can ever be made, by any group or nation, for actions which violate the fundamental freedoms of others.

It is the safeguarding of these universal rights and fundamental freedoms which shall ensure that that unity replaces fragmentation, and that one united sense of purpose, in the service of peace, overcomes the discord and division which is threatening our world at this time of uncertainty.

Let me therefore urge you to keep considering strategies for long-term defence which work for long-lasting peace.

Let us recognise that we are stronger when we take action in solidarity, speaking with one voice, to build a culture of positive peace among ourselves.

Europe, and the world, are stronger when we are united in the great work of peace, bridging our differences rather than building new walls which separate us from one another.

For this reason, it is also crucial that we bring on board the participation of the diversity of communities which make up our Union.

We cannot afford to exclude anybody from our consultations and conversations, because to do so would be to feed into a dangerous rhetoric of separation, of “Us against Them”, which would only increase risks of radicalisation and social unease.

Human security must always concern itself with increasing people’s access to participation, to be active promoters of their own protection and their own sense of security.

I would go further and say that not only should our strategies protect the rights and freedoms of individuals and their families. In a more positive and forward-looking sense, they should be

empowered and strengthened to be active participants, co-contributors, to the prosperity and the peace which shall be of such benefit to our European Union and our world.

Human development walks hand-in-hand with human security. This is what we must understand, if we are to work together on a truly human-centred approach to defence.

We must measure our successes by our commitment to ensure equity and inclusion, to promote justice, and to safeguard sustainable and meaningful peace for all.

The interventions we undertake, in various parts of the world where armed conflict and the risk of precarity can seem overwhelming, demand that we develop new and innovative responses.

The phenomena of climate change, of food and energy shortages, of violent radicalisation, and of transnational criminality require us to re-evaluate the ways in which our united family of nations are working together.

We must do more to promote a united and practical change in our status quo, courageously correcting its failures and inspiring a new way forward which captures the imagination and the active involvement of our citizens.

Let us also remember that the different societies that constitute our human family are linked as never before.

We are facing new opportunities and challenges, which no one nation can deal with alone.

Processes of globalisation have made us more aware of the intense interdependence that is transforming our ideas about state identity, the importance of the environment, the nature of warfare, and the future of defence.

As we become more closely linked together, by the realities of trade and culture and politics, so too must our commitment to build peace be an essential reality.

Just as the complex ecosystems in our natural world all work together, in mutual synergy, so too must we strive for peaceful unity, coming together as one human family, and as one planet.

We cannot afford to forget that whatever disturbances affect one part of the world will have repercussions, which are felt by all.

We can see this clearly, for example, in the situation currently underway in the Mediterranean Region. Peace and stability across both shores of the Mediterranean guarantees peace and stability within the European Union.

There can be no long-term and sustainable peace in Europe without an equal commitment to peace in the Mediterranean.

Therefore we must share one another's struggles, recognising that the challenges faced by all our brothers and sisters are our struggles, also. We must recognise that the freedom and the prosperity of each one of us must be reflected in the freedom and the prosperity of all of us.

For this reason, when we talk about the security of a nation, we must also talk about the quality of life experienced by every person who lives there.

When poverty, persecution, and a lack of access to employment or healthcare are not a reality within a nation, then we cannot talk of true security.

The protection and policing of external borders becomes little more than an empty exercise in territorial control, if the internal dynamics of a nation or a region are compromised by uncertainty and risk.

I urge every stakeholder to continue pursuing a global vision for human security.

Let us work together, in line with the United Nations Agenda 2030, and its Sustainable Development Goals. In this way, we shall maintain a much-needed sensitivity to the political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental realities which face our world at this critical juncture in our history.

Let us continue sharing policies and strategies, cultivating greater synergies between our authorities and institutions, and fostering friendships among the civil society activists and diverse communities within our nations.

We must work together to build a lasting peace in the hearts, the minds, and the homes of all the people of our earth.

We must move beyond a negative understanding of peace, as the mere absence of violence, to a positive approach that nurtures a practical culture of positive peace and global solidarity.

In this way, our discourse about security will be in harmony with our greatest aspirations for the full development and the deep-rooted flourishing of each and every person, community, and nation.

On concluding, I believe that the health of a nation can only be truly measured by the wellbeing of its citizens.

The greatness of a nation is most accurately reflected in the satisfaction and the prosperity of all its inhabitants.

Peace is the prize which we must achieve, working in synergy and in solidarity.

Peace is the lasting legacy we must secure together, for the benefit of both present and future generations.

Thank you.