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Official report of debates

Address by the Prime Minister of Malta

Mr Pierre PFLIMLIN (France, President of the Assembly)*: With unanimity and, indeed, considerable warmth, the Consultative Assembly declared itself in favour of the admission of Malta to theCouncil of Europe and thus this new State joined the great family of free European nations, for it is the raison d'etre of our organisationto bring together nations which, whatever their geographic diversity or the diversity of their political commitments even, are united by thewill to respect the principle of the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

I should like to express our warmest congratulations to the Prime Minister of Malta and our great pleasure at having this opportunity ofwelcoming him among us.

(Applause.)

I now invite him to come to the rostrum.

Mr George BORG OLIVIER (Prime Minister of Malta): Mr. President, it was with gratitude and no small measure of pride that my country received the invitation of the Council of Europe to become a Member. Malta comes to this Council to share in the deliberations of its organs and with the desire and the will to contribute to the efforts which are being made so that peace and prosperity, freedom and contentment, may reign throughout the lands which constitute this noble continent. It is also with gratitude and pride that I have received the invitation which you, Sir, were good enough to send me to address the Consultative Assembly in which today sit for the first time parliamentarians of Malta's House of Representatives. This invitation is a great honour much appreciated in my country.

Mr. President, membership of the Council of Europe has been to my country like returning home after a long absence. Even before Malta passed from the Carthaginian rule to become part of the Roman Empire, she was a haven to seafarers of all Mediterranean countries. For six hundred years my country enjoyed the peace of the Roman world. Five centuries of Byzantine rule then passed until Malta went under before the rise of Islam. Three hundred years went by and European institutions came back to us, first through the Normans, then the Swabians, the Angevins, the Aragonese and the Castilians, each of whom left their mark on our ancient civilisation. The truly European character of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem then left a permanent stamp on the island. The institutions inherited from the Order went through a period of evolution and metamorphosis under the British, and emerged to form what in Europe today is a society with characteristics of its own.

In this report:
– speeches in English are reported in full;
– speeches in other languages are reported using the interpretation and are marked with an asterisk (*);
– speeches in German and Italian are reproduced in full in a separate document.

With the recent attainment of independence, Malta regained her sovereignty of old and one of the most ancient nations of Europe returned to take its place among the free countries of this continent. It is for this reason that I said that coming to this institution is in many ways a homecoming after a period of absence. Here we feel truly at home, joined with other members of the family who share our basic concepts and philosophy and who are prepared to build on the native heritage of this, our Europe.

Members may be interested to hear what the policy of my Government is in relation to the Council and to European affairs in general, what we hope to be able to contribute, how we evaluate our relations with Europe and how we expect those relations to affect or to be affected by our relations with other parts of the world.

We bring to our membership of this Council two factors which influence our outlook. One is our position in the centre of the Mediterranean, and the other our membership of the Commonwealth. Our position in the middle sea causes us to take a natural interest in the North African coast and in events and developments there. Membership of the Commonwealth is shared with two other member States of this Council. These connections with North Africa and the Commonwealth are of importance to us and are in no way incompatible with the aims of this Council. They should indeed tend to foster the interest of the Council in both fields.

Whilst as a European country sharing a common culture, history and way of life, we naturally gravitate towards Europe, our geographical position makes us aware of the importance of North Africa, which shares, with six Members of this Council, a common sea, and which has much to contribute to the welfare of the area. We would therefore think that this aspect of European foreign policy could be given some more thought.

In any work of this nature, as in all other work of this Council, Malta is prepared to play her part within the limitations to which the island is subject by its size, present economy and other circumstances. Much progress has been made in European affairs since the inception of the Council in 1949. Some Members have gone further along the road than others in co-operating in certain fields; but for those Members not yet ready to be among the leaders there is room for co-operation and advance in various directions.

It is clear that many complex questions have still to be tackled and many problems to be solved. But it is equally clear that change must inevitably be slow and can rarely be spectacular to be sound; that the understanding of each other's difficulties must be a constant endeavour; that the ideal of Europe, a Europe more closely united, must continue to shine. These concepts we accept and to them we pledge our support. How far along the road we in Malta may go, how many of the commitments of this Council we are in a position to accede to, in what way we can offer to help, in what special fields of the activities of this Council we can make a contribution – these are things on which we have started thinking.

Not a few are worried by the thought that Europe is divided unto itself and has indeed been described as being at sixes and sevens.

Some wonder if, at times, professions of desire for unity are not made with mental reservations.

There are fears and suspicions. There are grave apprehensions that the more rapid the advance to political union among a group of nations of Europe the more difficult it will be to achieve later a wider union. This fear is real and has, I think, been referred to by eminent speakers in this Assembly before. It is well to say that this group of nations is setting the pace and is forming a nucleus to which other nations may later adhere.

But a nucleus tends to be rather hard to break into unless it is prepared to join another and, in shedding some of its characteristics, to take on others. This is where the fear lies. Will those nations which have toiled hard to form the nucleus be prepared to compromise or to adapt to changing circumstances the organisation which they have built at great sacrifice?

The fear is that there may arise a new form of nationalism which could keep Europe divided. It is the policy of the Council of Europe to take account of all opportunities for better relations between East and West Europe. This is important. But what is more important still is that, within the nations of Europe embracing the ideals of this Council, more should be done to condition the peoples represented in this Assembly to the idea of faster advance towards unity and to remind those nations now moving fast on the road to political union that they bear a grave responsibility – the responsibility to ensure that nothing they may do should ever impede a wider union.

It was this Council that first promoted European unity and it is felt that this same Council should continue to be the organ – to the exclusion of proliferation – charged with watching progress, encouraging progress and consolidating progress towards that ultimate objective.

Before leaving the rostrum may I also, on behalf of my parliamentary colleagues, congratulate you, Mr. President, on your well deserved re-election as President of this distinguished Assembly. While uttering our best wishes, we promise our loyal co-operation in your exacting task. Our good wishes go also to the eminent Minister who addressed this Assembly earlier and who has been elected as the new Chairman of the Committee of Ministers. Both yours, Mr. President, and his kind and encouraging references to Malta are very welcome and appreciated.

(Applause.)