



Opening Remarks by Hon. Dr George W. Vella Minister for Foreign Affairs of The Republic of Malta

High Representative/Vice President Mogherini,

Ministers,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

It is with great respect for each of you individually and in earnest anticipation of what we may achieve here together, that I welcome you all to the Valletta Joint Action Plan: Senior Officials Meeting.

Just over a year ago, our Heads of State and Government gathered here in Malta for the Valletta Summit in an effort to strengthen cooperation and come to terms with the challenges and opportunities of migration. We recognised that migration is a shared responsibility of countries of origin, transit and destination. We worked in a spirit of partnership to address our shared challenges and in so doing adopted the Valletta Joint Action Plan. Harnessing the existing mechanisms of the Rabat Process and the Khartoum Process, the Valletta Joint Action Plan sought a sustainable, humane solution to unprecedented levels of irregular migration by targeting five specific domains. Thus, we committed ourselves to:

- I. Address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement.
- II. Enhance co-operation on legal migration and mobility.
- III. Reinforce the protection of migrants and asylum seekers.
- IV. Prevent and fight irregular migration, migrant smuggling, and trafficking in human beings, and...
- V. Work more closely to improve co-operation on return, readmission, and reintegration.

Another vital deliverable of the Valletta Summit was the establishment of the European Union's Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa. Generously endowed with €2.3 billion by the European Union, this fund provided a concrete financial investment toward actualizing those elements and actions of our shared vision

Following over a year of enhanced cooperation and the launching of countless projects under the Trust Fund, it is time to take stock of our collective achievements and come to terms with the challenges that lay ahead. Broadly speaking, the progress made toward



implementation of the Valletta Joint Action Plan since its adoption, at political, policy and operational levels, is heartening. In hindsight, it is clear that the Valletta Summit inspired relevant stakeholders and fostered a renewed political momentum that has translated into measurable results on the ground. Of course, implementation levels have varied across domains with some bearing signs of significant progress, whilst gains in other areas prove more difficult to achieve.

Bilateral cooperation continues to be essential to the successful implementation of the Valletta Joint Action Plan. National actions also remain an essential element. For example, a significant number of member states party to the Valletta Summit have recently introduced new national migration policies or migration-related legislation. Furthermore, multilateral instruments and regional processes like the Khartoum Process, the Rabat Process, and the European Union's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, play a central role in the implementation of the Action Plan.

Beyond recognizing the immediate progress made toward achieving the goals set forth in the Valletta Joint Action Plan, we are proud to recognize the extent to which the Valletta Summit established a propitious political vision that reverberated across our continents with untold effect. By establishing a platform for cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination, the Summit nurtured a spirit of transcontinental cooperation.

The outcome of the Valletta Summit led to a series of initiatives launched by the EU, such as the New Partnership Framework in June 2016. Similarly, in September 2016 the European Commission endorsed a European External Investment Plan for Africa aimed at addressing the root causes of migration by mobilizing up to €44 billion in public and private funds for sustainable development in Africa. We look forward to seeing this Investment Plan come to fruition.

While the progress we've made toward sustainable, humane migration management over the past year is encouraging, the realities of mass migration are grave and at times even overwhelming. Vulnerable migrants drown in our sea or are lost forever in our deserts as they make desperate flight. Indeed, we must all acknowledge some degree of collective responsibility when confronted with the reality that more migrants lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea last year than ever before on record. Across two continents, governments and civil society organizations struggle to cope with the logistical burden of protecting and providing for unprecedented numbers of migrants and refugees. Mass migration challenges our respective sense of personal and national identity, and we see that when confronted with foreign peoples and their cultures, arriving in large, unrestricted numbers, it is all too easy to blame the victim for his or her own plight.

In the face of socio-political turbulence, at a time when globalization increasingly forces us to question our own identities, we must remain unyielding in our commitment to uphold our shared values. Realities show that migration is here to stay, at least in the near future. Beyond the primacy of saving lives, granting refuge and following through on our national and international commitments, what we do today will determine the nature of our world tomorrow. At its very essence, how we bear our responsibilities to care for those battered by the winds of change reflects who we are, as well as who we wish to be.



In the face of such a monumental task, with the costs of failure being so great, we must stand shoulder to shoulder, united in our common cause to secure a lasting, humane solution to a challenge that affects us all. We must:

- pursue our goals in a more balanced manner across the five priority domains and thus enhance ownership for all relevant stakeholders.
- seek greater efficiency in the disbursement and implementation of the EU Trust Fund and External Investment facility.
- give priority to addressing the root causes of migration in a sustainable, humane manner through economic investment and the creation of vocational opportunities.
- continue to expand possibilities for legal migration on the understanding that regularized forms of migration provide benefits to communities of origin as well as host communities.
- remain steadfast in our commitments to protect vulnerable persons, in conformity with international legal frameworks, with a particular focus on the plight of unaccompanied minors.
- double down on cooperative efforts aimed at combating smuggling and the trafficking of human beings, in part through institutional capacity building and enhanced border management.

Make no mistake, pursuing these goals requires relentless effort in moving toward a sustainable implementation of the Valletta Joint Action Plan. Crafting a roadmap toward a future we can all embrace will not be easy. However, the Valletta Joint Action Plan offers us the tools to move in the right direction and our presence here today is a reflection of our joint commitment to push forward and seek to achieve what we agreed upon fifteen months ago.

Rest assured, for its part, that Malta will remain committed to seeking sustainable solutions to the ongoing crisis in a spirit of solidarity with our partners, both here at the Valletta Joint Action Plan: Senior Officials Meeting, and in its role at the helm of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union going forward.

Thank You.