

We believe in the European Union. We want to be at the heart of a strong Europe because Europe is in our heart. The world needs a strong European Union.

This was stated by Foreign Minister Michael Frendo when opening a national conference organised by Forum Malta fl-Ewropa with the theme: Reflecting on the Future of the EU: Understanding the Implications of the Lisbon Treaty”.

Minister Frendo said that the Maltese people believe in the EU and joining the Eurozone at the beginning of this year, Malta came even closer to the heart of the Europe. But one has to ask if the European reform is still a relevant project today. The answer is Yes. And this is what drives us to carry on with the process of adapting the EU to meet the challenges of our time.

This is exactly what the Lisbon Treaty does. It brings reform to the organisation. It creates a human rights dimension of the EU. It gives national parliaments more power in the architecture of Europe. It even strengthens the European Parliament. The Treaty gives a higher profile to the European Union as an international actor in the world today.

The Foreign Minister said that the fact that Malta, through its Parliament unanimously ratified the Lisbon Treaty is a cause for celebration. We are a small country state which always sought to strengthen its identity. Sometimes people forget what it took to become members of the EU. Forty years after Independence – which was attained after centuries of struggle – the Maltese moved to break this mould and start sharing its sovereignty with other EU countries. That chapter in our history is now closed and the nation needs to move forward. Malta worked hard to get the best conditions in the EU Accession Treaty and the best conditions were clinched. That was a success story and it is now behind us.

The EU, Malta included, went to the European Convention and Malta signed the Constitutional Treaty which was accepted by the Maltese people through a Referendum. The EU moved on to the Lisbon Treaty which is an invitation to the Union to move on to its next stage and become of more relevance in the world.

Minister Frendo stressed that we are living in a world where a country on its own is not effective. Malta is the smallest of the states in the European family and it adhered to the Lisbon Treaty because Malta wants to belong to an effective Europe even on the world stage.

The Lisbon Treaty gives tremendous value to the European citizens. One needs to make it work because the Treaty addresses the challenges of our times

Climate change is one of such challenges. This is a global issue and no country can solve this problem on its own. Within the EU, Malta is in a better position to face this problem, because the Union is investing in further research in this area so that 20% of our energy will be derived from alternative sources.

Immigration is another challenge. Malta cannot tackle this problem on its own. Within the EU Malta can bring its voice and its concerns to the table of discussions and be in a position to address this issue and its causes and be in a position to defend our shores from criminal organisations who are using and riding on the plight of the illegal immigrants. The Lisbon Treaty should facilitate this process.

Minister Frendo referred to the meeting held in the past two days in Malta when Malta managed to bring together the EU member states and the Arab League member states to discuss ways of cooperation together. One major area of cooperation is energy security. Major fossil fuels producers and consumers came together to discuss the energy issue, amongst other things. This would not have been possible if we were not members of the EU.

This Meeting showed that Malta can be a pro active member in the EU, as long as we have good and positive ideas and have the tenacity to push them to fruition.

The Lisbon Treaty ensures that the European Union will be one of the strongest voices in the international fora and in the world. This would need a stronger Europe. A Europe which would be another voice of reason and moderation in the world. Europe needs to put its foreign policy at the forefront.

Michael Frendo said that an initiative that Malta will be taking within the EU is to suggest that the Union draws a document of Strategic Objectives in its Foreign Policy. Malta has a valid and serious contribution to give in this regard.