

Esteemed Guests,

I would like to welcome you all to this Conference and above all welcome representatives from the foreign twinned towns to the Maltese Islands wishing you a positive outcome of this conference enriched by a very pleasant stay on the Islands.

Zooming on Sustainability, an appropriate title fully encompassing the main objectives of this conference. The ability that together the proper goals can be achieved for the improvement of the quality of life of our communities.

Sustainable development relates to that development undertaken within our localities which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable local development also implies long-term planning and objectives that form part of local road-maps.

The basis for the principle of sustainable localities is a strong focus on the people as part of a family within neighbourhoods that form localities, localities that form regions that in turn form nation states. Thus, the concept of sustainable localities is a bottom-up approach to decision-making where local authorities take a central and important role. Through the various EU funded networking programmes local authorities are being encouraged to look outside their immediate confines in order to promote both local, regional and European well-being and a better quality of life. Through the implementation of local sustainable development, stronger synergy is being promoted across localities wherein each and every locality will strive to contribute towards local, national and European targets.

At present, localities are facing challenges arising from size, demographic, economic, environmental and social realities such as issues like

suitable/affordable housing, social exclusion, structural and demographic change, ageing and mobility.

As Local Councils we need to be the key players in the process of changing lifestyles, production, consumption and spatial patterns. Local Councils play a vital role in educating, mobilising and responding to the public to promote sustainable development and ensure that the actions taken today and in the future must not compromise the collective well being of future generations.

The Malta Government is doing its best at ensuring that sustainable development forms the basis of the proposals, decisions and actions taken for the foreseeable future. Sustainable development is in fact one of the main focuses on the national agenda. It will only come to fruition through the participation of all interested parties, through the involvement of the community at large; the private and public enterprise, NGOs and above all the Local Councils.

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development to be adopted will incorporate socio-economic and environmental development and will complement sectoral political strategies in other socio-economic, cultural and environmental areas.

The Malta Government believes in the economic, social, cultural and environmental potential of localities. Government strongly believes that the National Strategy for Sustainable Development has to be complemented and supported by initiatives on a local level.

To this respect Government has committed funds for the undertaking of initiatives relating to the planning of sustainable development strategies on a local basis. Funds will assist the provision of sustainable strategies in specific

localities in order to analyze the problems that may be encountered while implementing sustainable initiatives on a broader level.

Throughout the formulation of a tangible and realistic local sustainable development strategy, the main focus should be on the importance to ensure that all decisions and actions belong to a local plan that forms part of the national plan. Local Councils apart from striving in keeping the betterment of their local territory should also incorporate the social aspect such as social values, customs and traditions that shape up the local identity; sustainable environmental development; and sustainable cultural development. The success of Local Councils achievements should be measured in terms of their ability to positively influence the everyday life of the residents in their localities.

These three days will witness the creation of a network supporting more effectively the conception of initiatives to be embarked within a wider European dimension. In line with the Europe for Citizens Programme, this Conference through its workshops and plenary sessions aims at incentivising discussions on thematic sectors that promote citizen's engagement with major EU social issues namely through the implementation of initiatives aiming at:

- The protection and enhancement of the environment tackling issues such as waste management, urban conservation and regeneration and the enhancement of the authentic characteristics through the conservation of village cores and rural areas.
- The strengthening of thriving cultural and artistic concepts by maximizing the cultural diversities emerging from the respective localities through the promotion of the artistic and creative potential

towards the local community itself, towards guest communities and towards society at large

- The valorisation of human resources through the creation of sustainable employment patterns supporting those furthest from the labour market to re-engage and benefit from employment opportunities. Investing in education and lifelong learning by engaging in effective capacity building frameworks in areas relating to the maximization of EU funding opportunities at a local community level. Improving the overall economic performance in the localities by providing a better learning framework which tackles the skill gaps at the locality level in view of the entrepreneurial skill requirements

Only through the proper teamwork and through effective, responsible and proactive initiatives can we achieve tangible and intangible benefits for our communities, society at large and for the benefits of generations to come.

Whilst wishing you pleasant proceedings I would be please to meet you all once again during lunchtime so as to enable us to get to know each other better.