

Different Cultures...makes one Europe

Discovering our roots for a brighter future

It is my pleasure to welcome you this morning for this International Conference where we are consolidating our roots through the friendship. Europe above all is a reality of different cultures, but it is a forum where all of us as citizens can easily feel part of it, because this continent was always meant to live together. Europe is an experience shared and lived by each one of us. Europe is as beautiful as much as we strive for it to be. Europe gives a unique opportunity for solidarity. With the help of E.U. projects we are creating a forum where one feels at ease to live akin another individual, notwithstanding their different cultures - because they are mere branches from one stem – Europe.

As I'm saying all this my mind recollects the various experiences I lived in such a fantastic way. Through the Project YOUTH, and through the various benefits my small locality was able to achieve from the EU, my small locality of San Lawrenz witnessed how very true and possible it is to give a new vision and new opportunities to Europe – as it were, we're widening our horizons to the potential locked in our localities, regions and countries, bringing them out to the full daylight. We're creating a frame of mind where our youths are spurred to utter that they're not only Maltese, Italians, French, Belgian or British, but also European! This is essentially what we're aiming to reach – that our citizens feel to belong not just to an individual country, but to one Europe, and truly feel and believe that they're Europeans. This is what I and my citizens participating in these projects felt – as children and heirs of one common identity.

The other side of the coin is globalization – and the induction it brings to mellow different identities to one, which has no identity of itself and being neither a womb to many. This is the ghost which is threatening to erase our roots, our identity. Europe is not about having multinationals (like Mc Donalds) in every town and city. The grandness of Europe is that each corner of this continent has a story to recount, that out of common ingredients each household simmers an uncountable variety of wholesome aromas. This is Europe's potential. This is our identity. And this identity has got a high price tag.

However there is a real need that Europe promotes a more active European citizenship. One can't deny that much is being done in this regard, and in my opinion, in a very successful manner. But much more needs to be done. In this field, the local level of administration has an extremely important role to play. Education is another important factor, but is not to be limited to any academic level, but education in its widest sense, lived and experienced in ones daily chores.

Let us recall the wonderful experience we are living together in these last years, together we prepared for the twinning because we believed that this twinning has to be an experience lived by each and every citizen, we wanted to promote the active participation of each citizen, from all factions of society. Thanks to this our twinning is alive in both communities involved, not just existent on paper.

Everybody truly feels to be participating – all the social groups present in our respective villages have had their share in the organization. Our youths and children, were always the target of our aim as we really believe that they're Europe's future.

A point one must consider is the involvement of our youths – however not to the liking of the administrators, but as it suits our youths best! Nobody but our youths have to be our strategic partners! We have to be capable to make them truly understand and appreciate that our heritage, as handed from our fathers is the identity which structured us in what we are, and of which we should be proud of.

I feel that this is another method which can expose our potential to new horizons, which many a times we hold back and are afraid to expose.

The European commission provides us with a valid instrument for this, that which is known as **Plan D** - a plan which furthers us to achieve a fuller appreciation of our identity, enhances democracy, dialogue and debate.

It might well be that this document is primarily aimed to increase the citizens' awareness of the importance of the ratification of the E.U Constitution. However, if we stop at this, we'll be at a fault. Plan D has to be a continuing guide of how the E.U should do politics. Permit me to state that a European citizen will not feel any more European simply with the adopting of the Constitution. It is only when Europe's values and heritage are embedded in one's daily life that this person will feel truly European.

From the previous experiences we had together we lived the experiences that citizens in our localities were very conscious of their European identity not when the discussion reverted around Europe, but when they had the opportunity to share the daily life and its experiences with people of other cultures. Each one realized that life's problems are relatively the same on this continent. It is here that they felt to be members of one big European family.

What is my point? The idea I want to drive through is that we need to go back to our roots, to realize and appreciate our heritage. We need to rediscover what structured our Europe. These 'European Values', in my opinion are not being given their due importance. We're behaving as if we have this rich treasure, which we just keep locked in a chest. I'm calling for a re birth, a renaissance of European values.

Plan D puts such responsibility on us, local politicians, we who are the closest to our citizens. Let me remind you that we have a sworn duty to provide platforms from which citizens will feel confident to stand upon and voice their opinion. More to this they have to feel confident that their voice is really being considered!

We have to go back to our grassroots – I believe that this can be achieved through exchanges, taken seriously, in which one discusses the European political role in a more attractive manner as we are doing this morning. European politicians and beurocrats should participate more in similar exchanges, to get the real feel of how things are, taken from the view of the general public.

Another aspect are the Education and innovation two principles that have always to be at the forefront. Big Europe has to have the adequate tools to unlock the potential each individual has, be it in the remotest village or the most insular island!

My final words are directed in favor of a Europe open to new concepts and ideas. More to this, Europe has to get closer to its citizens. There is the need that our old millenary Europe be kept young, energetic and new through programmes and opportunities which really leave the desired impact. I sincerely appeal that this must not be done at the expense of these values which have characterized and distinguished the European continent for over two centuries. I'm referring principally to the Christian values that unfortunately were denied their just mention in the European Constitution. This is also an important aspect I feel the duty to talk about this values, I am not just a European Citizen, or a just European Mayor or and Representative in the Committee of the Regions but I am also a European Citizen and Mayor that I have at heart the Christian values. I believe that Europe is a solidarity forum because her roots are based on the Christian values. Let me here quote a true European Leader Pope Benedict XVI when during his last visit to Austria he insisted that "The "European home", as we readily refer to the community of this continent, will be a good place to live for everyone only if it is built on a solid cultural and moral foundation of common values drawn from our history and our traditions. Europe cannot and must not deny her Christian roots. These represent a dynamic component of our civilization as we move forward into the third millennium. Christianity has profoundly shaped this continent: something clearly evident in every country..."

Europe's largest potential lies in the uniqueness of each Europeans citizen. Providing our citizens with a multitude of opportunities, so as to cater for the vast millions of individuals, will surely make each one belong to one united Europe. Let us hold and truly appreciate our European identity. Let us get to the very heart of our society through exchange and similar initiatives. Each and every European citizen should be proud of whom he is and the historical baggage he has on his shoulder, and must feel responsible to pass on this baggage. Let us not oyster ourselves within our country's borders, but

enlarge and nourish our European principles and values. This can only be achieved through open dialogue, instilling a stronger democracy in our Europe

Noel Formosa

Mayor San Lawrenz