

Opening remarks by
Honourable Anġlu Farrugia,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Parliament of Malta

at the

**KICK-OFF SEMINAR – KEY AREAS FOR THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL
DIALOGUE**

3rd December 2015

Mr Bartho Pronk, President of EZA

Mr Piergiorgio Sciacqua, Co-President of EZA

His Grace Mons Giampaolo Crepaldi, Archbishop of Trieste

Mr Michel Servoz, Director General, DG Employment, European Commission

Mr James Bonello, President, UHM

Mr Josef Vella, Secretary General, UHM

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon.

It is an honour for me to be with you here today to open this forum on the European Social Dialogue which is being organised thanks to the collaboration between the UHM, which is one of the most active unions in Malta, and the EZA, the European Centre for Workers' Questions.

In a small country like Malta which does not have access to any natural resources which could fuel the economy, the importance of a strong workforce is ever more relevant. With the words 'strong workforce' I mean a workforce which not only has the necessary skills and qualifications, and the possibility to further these skills and qualifications, but also a workforce which is comforted by an adequate legal framework affording the workers those basic rights and conditions they deserve. Malta, also as an EU Member State, has in place employment legislation of the highest standards that can be found anywhere in the world, which coupled with the freedom of

movement of workers, means that an EU citizen has access to the same employment conditions throughout the European Union. Population ageing and falling birth rates are changing the nature of our workforce, and this is a considerable challenge for countries like Malta that have no other resources backing their economy.

Social dialogue is an overarching principle that covers all policy areas. The European Commission, through the 'Better Regulation Initiative' launched this October, has expressed its commitment to 'ensuring that policy is prepared, implemented and reviewed in an open, transparent manner, informed by the best available evidence and backed up by involving stakeholders'. In addition, at national level, Member States are obliged to carry out consultation with the stakeholders when proposing policy reform for the same purpose. As many of you may know, this is already being implemented in Malta.

This implies that Maltese social partners and civil society, like similar bodies and groups in the rest of the EU, have a unique chance to actively participate in policy formation. Social partners and civil society must be adequately informed to evaluate critically the proposed policies and to propose improvements. The project will contribute to providing more information as well as improving the capacity of the beneficiaries to participate in a more active manner in social dialogue, both at national and EU levels.

Training and improved accessibility to information will provide workers with more knowledge on social dialogue, thus contributing to its effectiveness in order to better support socio-economic development and strengthen labour market structures. The National Vocational Education and Training Policy, launched in Malta in 2015, identifies

unions as key players to champion the benefits of up-skilling and re-skilling.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Cooperation between the Member States and joint programmes are essential; only through better and coordinated social dialogue can social cohesion throughout the European Union be achieved. Social cohesion is the key to fight inequalities and poverty. One can debate at length whether the European Union – in the absence of any reference to religion in its founding treaties – is a Christian union or otherwise. However, in spite of the fast pace of secularisation in the EU, it is undeniable that the Union is rooted in Christian values, values which are central to your work, although absent in being declared for some reason or other.

As elected representatives of the people, lawmakers have a duty to ensure that the legislation they approve has gone through the better regulation test; it is for this reason that all the stages in the parliamentary approval of laws are open to the public. I am a firm believer in the transparency of the work of our elected representatives. It is for this reason that I have pushed strongly for Parliament to have its own TV channel, managed wholly by Parliament. This project came to fruition on 4th May of this year, when for the first time – coinciding with the first sitting held in the new Parliament building – the parliamentary sitting was broadcast in its entirety on the new TV channel. In October the project was completed as the proceedings started being broadcast free-to-air, which means that now everyone in Malta has the opportunity to follow Parliament. This, in my opinion, is a huge leap towards greater transparency and accountability of our law makers.

As lawmakers, parliamentarians consider not only local legislation but also legislation arising from European Union decisions. In this framework, an important role conferred on Parliaments is that of ensuring that legislation originating in the EU, and which has to be eventually transposed in the laws of the 28 Member States, has passed the test of subsidiarity. This means that, in areas of shared competence between the EU and Member States, national parliaments have the role of ensuring that the Commission, when proposing legislation, acts within the powers conferred to it by the Treaties and that EU-wide legislation will in fact be more efficient than measures taken individually by the Member States. If a certain threshold of reasoned opinions made by parliaments on a particular proposal is reached, then the Commission is obliged to review its proposal. Yet, today this is not enough. National parliaments should have more empowerment and I have strongly suggested to the EU Institutions to start with a pilot project in this regard.

Parliament must continue to evolve in order to adapt to the new realities which we find ourselves in, including those that result from EU membership. Specifically, I believe that the new cycle of economic governance put in place as a result of the financial crisis needs to be given greater attention by our Parliament, especially in considering the country specific recommendations issued by the Commission, which often include recommendations which could have a bearing on industrial relations and employment conditions.

In the forthcoming future, I look forward to see Parliament becoming fully autonomous and to providing the opportunity to the public to be able to contribute to the legislative process. The government has already launched its public consultation platform for new legislation

and policies; for Parliament the next step will be to replicate or integrate this in its own legislative procedure.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and gentlemen

I do not wish to take up more of your time as I know that you have a very intensive programme in these two days. I therefore wish you all a fruitful and productive debate which will feed into the national programmes for the implementation of the European Social Dialogue.

Thank you.