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# Press Release

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PR190348

22.02.2019

## **PRESS RELEASE BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

### *Maltese Parliamentary delegation participates in the 13<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean*

On 21 and 22 of February 2019 a delegation of the Maltese House of Representatives participated in the 13<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) which took place in Belgrade, Serbia. The Maltese delegation, headed by Parliamentary Secretary Aaron Farrugia, was composed of Members of Parliament Clayton Bartolo, Ivan Bartolo, Ryan Callus and Etienne Grech.

This year's PAM Annual Session continued to bring to the forefront the importance of promoting inter-parliamentary discussions on issues of common concern, including ways how to counter the evolving terrorist threat, political and security developments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, trade and investment challenges, climate change effects and opportunities, human rights, migration and the protection of cultural heritage.

Addressing the 1<sup>st</sup> Standing Committee on counter-terrorism strategies, MP Farrugia emphasized the importance of addressing the root causes of terrorism. He highlighted that a number of foreign terrorist fighters come from a modest background and unstable regions and consequently end up looking at terrorist organisations as their only hope. He underlined that it is important for governments to place more emphasis on youth, as they have the potential to successfully and effectively transform their own future. He spoke on the need for Mediterranean countries to provide every child with a sure start, thus developing a long term educational and employment programme where one can fulfil his ambitions and aspirations.

Intervening also during this session, MP Ryan Callus spoke on the need to develop more comprehensive preventive programmes for children and youth exposed to radicalism and extremism. In these early stages of a young person's life, it is easier to limit the effects of radicalisation as opposed to converting foreign terrorist fighters on their return to their homeland. He explained that there are multiple reasons why a person opts to join a terrorist organisation, including but not limited to socio-economic inequality, discrimination, poor educational structures, and how the lack of quality employment opportunities interplay in the trajectory towards violent extremism and terroristic aspirations.

Addressing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Standing Committee on the ongoing migration crisis in the Mediterranean, MP Aaron Farrugia spoke on the importance to recognise the countries, such as Malta, which continue to face large influx of migrants. He highlighted that Malta receives per capita the biggest number of irregular migrants and said that Malta is proud to be part of the European coalition of the willing,

thus promoting the integration and relocation of migrants. The head of the Maltese delegation addressed also the issue of human traffickers and called on countries to address, in an effective manner, transnational crime and called on NGO vessels, which conduct search and rescue operations, to stick to their terms of reference and observe international law.

Intervening also during this session, MP Etienne Grech highlighted that Malta has always remained committed to its Mediterranean vocation and continues to actively promote the role of parliamentarians to bring about positive and durable change. He invited members present to refer to the 17 January 2019 Valletta Conclusions, adopted by the national Parliaments of the 5+5 Western Mediterranean dialogue, which focus on the importance to address migration within a holistic framework, thus including action related to climate change and sustainable development, youth, education and employment.

*The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) gathers the national parliaments of the countries of the Mediterranean region and plays a fundamental role as a regional inter-parliamentary organization. The work and activities of PAM are firmly rooted in parliamentary diplomacy aimed to foster security, stability and peace in the Euro-Mediterranean region. During the 13<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session Sen. Alia Bouran from Jordan was elected as the new PAM President.*