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SPEECH BY

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AT THE OPENING OF THE 40<sup>TH</sup> INTERPOL EUROPEAN REGIONAL  
CONFERENCE,

QAWRA - WEDNESDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> MAY 201

Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government and people of my country, it is an honour for me to welcome you to Malta for the 40<sup>th</sup> Interpol European Regional Conference.

It is indeed a privilege to have you here for this vital conference just one year short of Malta's marking its 40th anniversary of membership in INTERPOL. It has been almost 40 years of Malta's active participation in this global network that is the prime driver of international co-operation in the fight against crime. We are also pleased to host this conference at a time when international co-operation in this field has become not merely crucial, but essential.

The saying that crime knows no borders or boundaries has taken on a new, more literal meaning with the advent of globalisation. We are indeed living in an age where a crime using technological means committed on a server which is connected to the internet anywhere in the world, affects the lives of millions of people in London, San Francisco, Berlin or Valletta. It is a time when a criminal can commit his crime from the comfort of his home using a pair of copper wires. His victims and potential witnesses to the crime would probably never have met him. They might not speak his language and they might even be on the other side of the planet.

Law enforcement agencies are thus finding themselves increasingly having to act in a likewise 'globalised' manner in their pursuit of criminals. This might make investigating a crime more laborious and slow, but we certainly did not allow this to become our Achilles' heel. We have helped each other in the past; we still do, and will continue to do so in the future. INTERPOL was the determining factor which helped us to develop this trust, allowing us to form effective working relationships across the globe – relationships that are there to stay. This is the solid foundation that we must continue to build on.

On a regional level, the European Union is a driving force in this direction. It is comforting to note that the EU is playing a key role in the function of INTERPOL in the European context. INTERPOL also acknowledges the importance of the EU as a partner in the fight against crime by having a permanent Special Representative in Brussels.

Malta has benefited greatly from membership in the European Union because it allowed us to instantly tap into and contribute to the various data and information networks that form part of the tools of the "Area of Freedom, Security and Justice" of the EU.

The implementation of the Schengen Information System II and the Prum Decision, among other initiatives, are bringing about an unprecedented investment in the development of intra-European crime information networks which will lessen the time that our law enforcement agencies spend investigating cross-border crime, illegal immigration and other rogue activities such as terrorism. For Malta, this has also had the positive effect in the procurement of new equipment such as a state-of-the-art DNA analysis machine, which is to be installed shortly, and an advanced Automatic Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) for our Police Corps.

With these tools at hand, as well as thanks to the co-ordinating function of the specifically-formed EU bodies such as EUROPOL, CEPOL and EUROJUST, we are witnessing an increase in the efficiency of how our police forces operate when tackling such crimes. In this regard, Malta had also given its full support to the COSI initiative - The Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security - which was started under the Spanish Presidency of the Council.

FRONTEX is another EU agency which is very relevant to us. This is due to Malta's geographical location as the southern-most border of the European Union and the migratory flows from North Africa which we have been witnessing for a number of years. What was already a serious situation was exacerbated in recent months by the civil war in Libya and the ensuing humanitarian crisis. People are fleeing Libya by the hundreds, taking to the sea on boats that are barely seaworthy in search of safety on the European mainland. Some make it to Lampedusa or Sicily in Italy, others are

rescued by our Armed Forces and brought to Malta, while others, sadly don't and perish in the Mediterranean Sea.

Malta is caught in the middle of this crisis and cannot handle this migratory pressure alone. In the past six weeks we have witnessed the arrival of more than 1,100 asylum seekers who joined those who had arrived here in the past few years. This is a very large number for a small island nation such as Malta with its 400,000 inhabitants. It is for this reason that we have been constantly calling constructively for assistance and solidarity from the European Union and fellow member states. This has been met with action to assist us being actively promoted by Home Affairs Commissioner, Cecilia Malmström. Indeed, there is far more to do on this path. The extraordinary Home Affairs Council meeting in which I will be taking part tomorrow in Brussels will be another step in this direction so as to grant a better life to these asylum seekers.

I am therefore very satisfied to note that immigration in the Mediterranean Sea and the prospective operational co-operation between FRONTEX and INTERPOL in this area is one of the topics that will be addressed during this afternoon's session of the conference. This, to my mind is a positive act of solidarity from INTERPOL's part. Your voice has due weight in the international arena and I acknowledge that you too are supporting us on this matter.

The fight against crime was one of the net beneficiaries of the process of globalisation through the valuable interfacing work of INTERPOL. As can be clearly seen from the wide-ranging choice of subjects that will be discussed over the coming two days, I am confident that this conference will give an important contribution to the further strengthening and expansion of co-operation in the fight against transnational crime beyond the borders of the European Union.

I thank you for your participation and wish you every success in your work during your stay in Malta.

Thank you.