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ADDRESS BY THE HON ANTON TABONE, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, AT THE SECOND SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN – PALAZZO SPINOLA, ST. JULIAN'S – THURSDAY, 22nd NOVEMBER 2007

President Radi,
Excellencies,
Distinguished parliamentarians,
Ladies and Gentlemen

You will allow me, at the outset, to extend a warm welcome to all delegates who will participate in the workings of the second session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. I am proud that the Maltese House of Representatives is hosting parliamentarians representing nearly all Mediterranean national parliaments.

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to address such a distinguished gathering at the inaugural session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. I thank you all for being with us today.

Three activities form part of today's programme. The first and, rightly so, is the inauguration of the Parliamentary Assembly, the second is the signing of the Agreement by which the Government of Malta will formally hand over Spinola Palace to the Parliamentary Assembly to be used as its Headquarters and finally, the formal opening of the Headquarters by H. E. the President of Malta.

Whilst underlining the importance of such activities, you will join me in extending my appreciation and thanks to the Maltese parliamentary delegation, the Organising Committee, the Secretariat of the Assembly and all those persons who were involved in the preparations leading to these events.

Distinguished Guests,

You will agree when I say that there has been much talk about the Mediterranean over the years. Various international fora treated, at length, important and delicate issues pertaining to the Mediterranean and its people.

The political aspect, peace and security in the Mediterranean has been dealt with ad nauseam and continues to figure prominently on the international agenda. The economic dimension, trade and investment and the establishment of a Mediterranean Investment Bank, has been raised on many occasions in various fora. The social aspect, gender and human rights issues, inter religious and inter-cultural dialogues, has also received the attention they deserve.

You will also readily agree that one of the fundamentals that the Mediterranean region lacks today is a comprehensive form of union. I leave it up to you to conclude whether this has happened by mere chance or by design. You will agree that, to date, Mediterranean cooperation is limited to sub regional groupings which, though relevant in their own way, do not incorporate all countries and thus cannot deal effectively and comprehensively with the wide ranging issues pertaining to the whole region.

I firmly believe that Mediterranean unity will only materialise through an all-inclusive approach and determined action that will lay the foundations for effective cooperation in all sectors and at all levels.

Unity should constitute the overarching theme of this Assembly. We, as Mediterraneans and as parliamentarians, have the necessary credentials to achieve what has eluded us for years. We now possess the tools necessary to promote closer cooperation and understanding amongst the peoples of the region. We are duty bound, as Mediterranean parliamentarians, to endeavour towards this noble goal. In so doing, we should realise that our Assembly is not replacing or competing with other important processes. Our Assembly represents a unique parliamentary forum that brings together all the national parliaments bordering the Mediterranean littoral. It should be supported by one and all.

I also believe that this Parliamentary Assembly should provide the rallying call for enhanced cooperation. This Assembly should be the launching pad towards a better use of our innumerable resources for the well-being of all people in the region, a better understanding of our rich cultural heritage and an effective and determined inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue that do away with real or perceived divisions in our region. Above all, we should build on our common heritage.

We cannot achieve anything if we are not united. On the contrary, we will lose everything if we are divided. My strong appeal for unity is a sincere one. Malta has no ambitions of whatever nature. The Maltese have not been endowed with a large territory and possess few, if any, natural resources. However, the Maltese

do not lack determination and initiative. This was constantly shown during the last decade by our parliamentary delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, leaving no stone unturned until this Parliamentary Assembly was eventually set up.

I am sure that now and in the future Maltese parliamentarians will not shy away from their responsibilities but will continue, with their proposals and initiatives, to work towards a secure, stable and peaceful Mediterranean.

Later this evening, you will participate in the official opening of the Headquarters of the Assembly at Spinola Palace, a historic palace that was made available by the Maltese Government to host the Secretariat of the Assembly. This demonstrates Malta's strong and ongoing commitment towards this project.

Finally, it is imperative to underline the cooperation and assistance of the Inter-Parliamentary Union under whose auspices this Assembly was set up. This was due largely to President Casini who, unfortunately, had to cancel his trip to Malta because of personal matters. The Assembly was also fortunate enough to be steered along through the initiative and determination of President Radi whom I thank for his endeavours and wish him well in his new post.

I also wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to all of you, and particularly to all parliamentarians who accepted our invitation to participate in the opening of the Second Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean.

I augur you all a successful conference.

Thank You

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