

Malta speech

Prime Minister,

Friends,

We have come together here in Paola today, with my friend Joseph Muscat who is making Malta stronger and fairer.

We have come together here in Malta, which 10 years ago made the historical choice of joining the European Union.

We have come together because we know the next European elections are not just any election.

For the **first** time people will decide what kind of Europe they want.

For the first time the people will decide who will be the next President of the European Commission.

I want to become the President of the Commission!

The first Commission President who is not the result of a backroom deal.

The first Commission President who is the result of a democratic vote.

Friends,

I am a German born in 1955 into a modest family as the youngest of five children.

I grew up after the war.

And the generation of my parents were asked to make painful sacrifices: longer work hours, higher taxes, lower salaries, and no holidays.

And our parents made these sacrifices without complaining.

For their children.

They wanted their children to have a better future.

And we did - we had a life they could not have dared to dream about - born into peace and raised into prosperity.

Over the past five years, politicians of my generation have demanded similar sacrifices from people: lower salaries, slashed pensions, higher taxes, reduced rights of workers and fewer public services.

And what for?

Not for the common good. Not for the future.

But to save the banks!

And our children are unemployed.

Governments all over Europe answered to the crisis with: "Pain for people, billions for banks."

And people are suffering. Homes have been lost, jobs destroyed, businesses crushed, schools closed and health care cut.

Divisions are widening.

Divisions within European countries.

And divisions between European countries.

Sadly, the crisis has not bound us closer together - but driven us apart.

Today, 120 million Europeans live in poverty or under its threat.

That's shameful!

27 million Europeans who want to work cannot find a job. In some countries more than every second young man or woman is unemployed.

The young generation are paying with their life chances for a crisis they have not caused.

Having a job is also about dignity.

I well remember the first day of my traineeship back in 1975, on the 1st of February.

I was so proud to be able to say that I was a trainee; that I would someday become a qualified bookseller.

And a few years later I opened my own bookstore.

Never again have I had the same feeling of achievement and purpose as I had on that day.

As Commission President I want to redress the balance between rich and poor, between large and small, between countries and within countries.

I want us to be partners and friends again in Europe.

I want to bring people together again.

I want to restore trust.

I want communities built on fairness.

I want a Europe based on mutual trust and respect.

A Europe where countries work together on an equal footing.

A Europe where one country cannot claim primacy over others because of its economic strength.

Friends,

Some of you know that I was for many years the mayor of a town in the border region between Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

This is where I come from, this is where I have my roots and this is where still live with my family today.

During these years as a mayor, I learned one important lesson.

Being a mayor is not about big ideological discussions. It's about finding **practical, pragmatic solutions** for the everyday problems of people.

Sitting down with the works councils and the entrepreneurs, the clergyman and the teacher to find solutions for the needs of the people.

As a mayor I had to make sure that someone collects the rubbish, repairs the traffic lights and drives the school bus.

My Europe is also built from the bottom-up!

I strongly believe that everything that can be better done on a local, regional or national level - should be done with on a local, regional or national level.

I want the EU to act where it brings added value to its citizens.

Because together we are stronger!

Let me focus for a moment on one of those issues where the EU can make a difference: the issue of **migration**.

As election time comes closer, the **siren calls** are increasing:

Some want us to shed crocodile tears. And then bury our heads in the sand. Hoping the issue will go away.

Others want to turn back the clock. Pull up the drawbridge. And renounce our international obligations and our European values.

I'm standing as the common candidate of the Party of European Socialists because I want to propose a **different course** to you - I want to put Europe back on its feet.

I want us to **manage** migration as best we can.

In line with our values and **clear principles**.

So that it benefits our societies and our economies.

And so that those arriving on our shores are given a chance to find a place and play a **positive part**.

First principle: we must strive to uphold human life and dignity.

Every life counts.

Every single life lost off our shores - man, woman or child - is a stain on our civilisation.

Secondly: I believe that Europe is a **continent of immigration.**

But we are a continent without a migration policy!

And the sooner we face this fact the better.

Thirdly: I believe that the **European Union** can contribute in a positive way to managing migration.

Fourthly, I believe that we should act together in a spirit of **loyalty** and **solidarity.**

With a **fair sharing of responsibility** among **all 28** Member States.

Fifthly, I believe in an **orderly, rule-based approach** to migration which does everything it can to avoid driving desperate people into the hands of criminals.

Sixth point, I believe that migration needs a **long-term vision** and lasting political commitment to fulfil our long-term needs.

To make sure that the EU is attracts the skills which it needs for its labour market;

To develop new relationships with countries in our neighbourhood based on mutual respect and shared interests.

Friends,

Last year, more than two thousand persons arrived here in Malta by boat from Libya.

A quarter of them were children.

More than forty five thousand arrived by boat if we include Italy and Greece.

They arrived not to start a new life in those countries.

They arrived because these countries happen to be gateways to Europe.

For each person reaching our shores, we will never know for sure how many more have drowned in the sea.

And we all have in mind last year's tragedies off the coast of Lampedusa.

We cannot stand by and watch more people die.

I want to make Lampedusa a **turning point** in the EU's migration policy.

But as the camera teams leave, the temptation is great to turn away and let the countries deal with the matter on their own.

This attitude undermines the foundation of the European Union. I will not accept this attitude!

Malta has a population of four hundred and nineteen thousand.

But Malta is responsible for coordinating search and rescue operations in a maritime zone of a quarter of a million square kilometres.

It's a **disproportionate duty**.

Of course Europe cannot take in everyone.

But we are the richest continent in the world.

We can do more.

If we act **together**.

Look for solutions together.

And shoulder our responsibilities together.

Let's not forget: **no one is asking** Europe to take on the misery of the whole world.

Far from it!

Less than four per cent of Syrian refugees have sought safety in Europe.

Lebanon – a country with less than five million people - is now putting up more than **one million** Syrian refugees.

Turkey has over half a million Syrian refugees.

Earlier this year, I visited a refugee camp in Jordan.

This refugee camp houses one hundred thousand refugees.

And Jordan has just opened a new refugee camp.

Ladies and gentlemen, Friends,

I believe that the management of the EU's outer borders is a **common European responsibility**.

It is not a Maltese, a Greek, an Italian or a Bulgarian issue.

It is a question of solidarity that we manage our external borders securely and humanly.

Clearly, a **European response** is needed.

National and European efforts must be stepped up and fully coordinated;

We must convince our North Africa partners to communicate with us in real-time on maritime surveillance issues;

No shipmasters must be afraid of prosecution when they provide life-saving assistance;

All operations must respect fundamental rights and the principle of *non refoulement*.

I want a **strong Commission** to **drive** the evaluation process at the external borders and be **outspoken** where weaknesses are detected

Friends,

How can we seriously claim to have a **Common European Asylum System**?

Today, the level of pressure is **not common**.

And the responsibilities are **not evenly divided**.

You know this: Malta has one of the highest proportions of asylum seekers in the EU;

Today, some countries grant asylum to a high number of asylum seekers, others only to a few.

The results differ greatly between countries.

Today, we have an asylum system, the Dublin system, where it not always clear to everyone, who is in charge.

A system that continues to perplex our courts.

A system many perceive as lacking the necessary flexibility.

As Commission President I want to act in a pragmatic and practical way.

I want to increase **resettlement**.

We can learn from Malta's experience with **relocation** and take it to the next level.

I want to test the **joint processing** of applications by several countries.

Countries could **pool reception capacity**;

And we should focus more on **integrating** refugees.

And boost the role of the European Asylum Support Office, here in Malta, in **monitoring the quality and consistency** of asylum decisions.

Friends,

Populists and some on the right claim that all asylum seekers are in reality economic migrants or "**economic refugees**". I cannot accept this term.

Closing our borders to people who legitimately seek protection can never be our answer.

We cannot turn our back on people fleeing from persecution and war!

Europe should be a safe haven for people fleeing from war and persecution!

But asylum is not the right tool to deal on its own with migration - it was **never meant** to fulfil this role.

In case of a **mass influx of displaced persons** from conflict zones we need special **temporary protection**.

As President of the Commission I will constantly review the situation and keep this option on the table.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

We must **fight the causes** of migration - never the migrants themselves.

This is why we must do more when it comes to **prevention**.

Migration has to be a key issue in all our international relations, particularly with the **transit countries** in North Africa, such as Libya, and the **countries of origin** to the South and to the East.

For us and our Mediterranean neighbours, migration and mobility should be **shared challenges**.

Our partnerships with these countries should be more focused on **encouraging reforms**.

Reforms in the field of human rights, building up capacities and institutions, impartial judicial systems, raising labour standards and narrowing social and economic inequalities.

I want us to make the most of our **mutual growth opportunities**, in energy, infrastructure, research, training and education.

I want to build on the EU's successes as a leader in **development policy**, reducing the factors which push people to migrate.

I want people to see a future for themselves and to invest in their own countries.

And our **trade policy** must contribute to the protection of labour, social and environmental rights

Friends,

For twenty years, I've been supporting an immigration policy which is totally different to the ones which exist today.

I've been saying that Europe is a continent of migration, therefore a **system of legal migration** with clear criteria is necessary for people to work and live here in Europe.

And we must also be clear that having a possibility of legal migration does not mean that **everyone can come**.

As Commission President I will therefore propose such a system.

I am in favour of **well-organised, orderly** legal immigration.

Because irregular migration is **uncontrolled and unfair**.

I am in favour of each country having to accept its **share** of migrants.

Because I want to **save lives** and undercut the criminal human traffickers.

I want migrants to be **integrated** as full members of society, be free from discrimination and contribute to the economy.

I want Europe to **get the skills** it needs. We have an ageing population and a shrinking labour force.

I want our Universities to be **magnets** for the most gifted foreign students.

I want us to remain the first tourist destination in the world - and I will harness the full potential of our visa policy to achieve this.

I want us to be competing in the global race for talent by attracting scientists, researchers, IT specialists and entrepreneurs!

Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

Xenophobic and europhobic parties are gaining ground.

For every problem they have a scapegoat - but **not a single solution.**

In Italy, a government minister said, when he sees the small boats of the migrants, he wants to hear the **roar of the cannons.**

In Hungary, a skinhead was just elected as Vice-President of a democratic parliament with votes from the right-wing governing party.

The demons of the past have not been banished - they have only been kept at bay.

Together, I want us to fight back for a different **Europe**.

A Europe of **fairness and solidarity**,

A Europe which upholds **social and fundamental rights**,

And we will show them on 24 May that **together we are stronger!**

Flimkien aktar b'sahhitna !