



## **Delegation of Malta**

**Keynote Statement by H.E. Ambassador George Doublesin,  
Ambassador of Malta to Egypt, Head of the Delegation of Malta to the  
2004 OSCE Mediterranean Seminar  
(Sharm El Sheikh, 18-19 November, 2004).**

**Session 3 – Migration – Opportunities and Challenges  
– A View from Malta –**

**Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt**

**19<sup>th</sup> November, 2004**

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to the 2004 OSCE Mediterranean Seminar  
'Migration – Opportunities and Challenges – A View from Malta'  
Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt  
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Mr. Chairman  
Distinguished delegates  
Colleagues

I am indeed honoured to be delivering this statement here in Sharm el Sheikh – an idyllic setting, epitomising both the charm and beauty of the Mediterranean but also the site where some of the most important political initiatives meant to engage the Mediterranean region in a process of far-reaching dialogue, have been undertaken.

I pay tribute to Egypt - not just for hosting this and other OSCE Mediterranean seminars - but for its unstinting efforts to contribute to the Mediterranean dialogue, fully aware of the fact that like Malta, it too believes in the linkage principle – by now recognised throughout – that security in the Mediterranean and security in Europe are intimately inter-linked and considerations on one cannot be detached or discussed in vacuum from the other.

Malta pioneered in raising it - and never ceased doing so - within the CSCE/OSCE process. In truth, principle apart, we never really had a choice as our immediate security was at stake. Situated right at the heart and thick of it, for better or worse, this daunting reality was crystal clear to us following independence in '64. It becomes all the more clear now as we navigate in this era of increasing globalisation and free-trade zones. Being the cradle of the three main civilisations – and with inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue so topical in this day and age – security in the Mediterranean is crucial for security in Europe, not merely because of geographical contiguity, but also for more sensitive trans-border issues which gained global focus in recent years. These are testing times for the Mediterranean region, characterised on the one hand by praiseworthy initiatives to engage the main regional actors in much-needed and determined dialogue for better political, cultural, social and religious understanding, and on the other, unprecedented attempts at interrupting it. Nevertheless, the *un-intimidated will to dialogue*, coupled by the disposition to reach durable solutions, *should be made to prevail*, as all other alternatives can only undermine security in the Mediterranean, Europe and beyond.

Mr. Chairman,

Our objective this morning is to address migration, with the challenges and opportunities that it creates to and within the Euro-Mediterranean region.

1. At the outset, it has to be borne in mind that the fundamental characteristic of migration is its *inherent dynamic nature*, the need that motivates movement, within and

beyond borders, within and beyond continents. Migration precedes history and is not a recent phenomenon.

2. Secondly, one should not lose sight of the essential fact that irrespective of how lucrative and tempting the push and pull factors of migration might be, the painful point of departure of the migrant remains *home*. Like others, the Maltese experienced the heaviest outflows of migration following the Second World War, with destinations mainly being English-speaking countries, such as the UK, Australia, Canada and the United States. It is estimated that the combined number of successive post-war generations of migrant Maltese living in Australia alone exceeds the actual population of Malta. For this reason, but not only for it, Malta can *empathize* with the migrant.

3. Thirdly, contemporary migratory flows are characterised by a combination of *push and pull factors* which include: political persecution, full scale warfare, humanitarian crises, economic disparities or outright poverty on the one hand, and stability, prosperity, high standards of living and future aspirations on the other.

4. Fourthly, in better understanding the intricate humanitarian phenomenon of contemporary migration, one can no longer limit the parameters of its dynamic to countries of origin and countries of destination. As Malta can testify first hand, the full picture includes another important, though recent dimension. *Transit countries* also come into play. Contrary to post-WWII migration, the push factors culminating within countries of origin *by far exceed* the absorptive and sustainable capacity of the countries of destination.

5. Fifthly, as a result of globalization and increasing trans-border freedom, migratory tendencies with Europe as destination are sharply on the increase. However European policies and structures for sustainable and effective migrant absorption are not yet in place. Meanwhile, traffickers capitalize on this period of transition by setting up networks operating *illegal immigration* – a most unfortunate recent phenomenon. Seen as a source of quick revenue, illegal immigration becomes part of the operations of international criminal networks which are involved in trans-frontier smuggling of people, narcotics and arms.

In this respect, the tragedy of ‘*boat people*’ who are being illegally smuggled from North African coasts and promised the shores of the southern European mainland against the exorbitant payment of a lifetime’s savings is a phenomenon severely affecting Malta as a country in transit. I intend to return to this issue later.

Mr. Chairman

Migration is a major issue for our global future. Given the fact that some regions in the world are wealthy and have *ageing populations* while others are poor, politically unstable and with young and *growing populations*, there are and will inevitably be very strong pressures towards geographical mobility. Nowadays, migration is connected with

problems of integration in the receiving countries, of brain-drain in the sending countries and of various threats to the human security of migrants. Our basic objective should be to engineer migration in such a way that sending countries, recipient countries and the migrants themselves benefit from geographical mobility.

Mr. Chairman

Today Europe is home or host to a fifth of the world's migrant population, or 36-39 million international migrants. Some 33-35 million migrants have taken up residence in one of the 15 old EU member states. The 10 new member states host fewer than two million permanent or long-term residents who are foreign born<sup>1</sup>. This almost equals the size of the foreign-born population in the United States. Migration to Europe – mostly originating from the geographical vicinity – is related to major economic, demographic and political gaps between the EU and the neighbouring regions. In most EU member states, all indications point to a gradual decline in populations. In this situation, migration from poorer but demographically growing to richer societies which are demographically at a standstill, is almost inevitable.

Economic indicators clearly show two things: the large gap between Europe and neighbouring regions, but also considerable heterogeneity within these regions. The maximum ratio per capita income between the richest European and poorest MENA-20 country is 82:1. For the regional per capita averages, the ratio still amounts to 17:1. These imbalances explain why Europe will continue to be a major attraction for migrants, even in times of slow economic growth, domestic unemployment in many EU countries and growing efforts to control and eventually reduce the inflow of asylum seekers and regular and irregular labour migrants. In 2001 alone, some 1.47 million new immigrants took up legal residence or claimed asylum in one of the then 15 EU member states.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Chairman,

Migration might be in the interest of sending countries wanting to reduce pressure on their labour markets, avoid the under-utilisation of skills and encourage remittances generated by their migrant diaspora. For some countries such remittances have become a major source of hard currency capital. At the same time, such migration may be in the interest of the countries of destination as a means to reduce current and future shortages of labour and skills.

Migration should be seen as a *partial answer* to both surplus labour in sending countries and ageing and eventually shrinking domestic workforces in Europe. Migration can only play such a role if countries of destination are able to attract migrants with needed skill levels; and if these migrants have access to formal labour markets. To this end, Europe, for instance, will have to develop a *comprehensive migration policy* that incorporates selection and admission procedures for people who qualify for economic reasons as

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<sup>1</sup> Munz and Fassman (2004)

<sup>2</sup> OECD Statistics (2004)

temporary migrants or as permanent immigrants. Europe might also find itself in need of unskilled migrants.

Mr. Chairman

A permanent dialogue between the competent European institutions and sending countries could explore the possibility of co-operation in various migration-related fields. Focus could be laid on issues such as common-border management, agreements on visa regimes and work permits; duly authorized travel arrangements, living and working conditions of migrant workers and permanent immigrants; brain drain and skill formation; channels and average costs of remittances. Such migration-related issues could be included in future trade, co-operation and association agreements between European institutions, such as the EU, and third countries.

All attempts to develop and implement coherent migration regimes as well as integration and citizenship policies hinge on public support among domestic populations and polities of sending and receiving societies. It is therefore necessary to explain why and how shaping future migration to Europe can be managed in the best interest of both migrants and receiving states.

Mr. Chairman,

In most countries of Europe today, public concern has brought about a political emphasis on immigration restriction, if not prevention, on the assumption that social and fiscal costs of immigration may outweigh its benefits. Recent terrorist activities in Europe and the United States have intensified security concerns. This may create considerable disincentives for sending countries to effectively police their borders, insist on would-be migrants going through the proper channels of departure and transit and repatriate their citizens from abroad. At the same time, European countries of destination allocate more resources for the control of their borders, processing of asylum seekers and repatriation of third-country nationals who do not qualify for residency.

Within the EU, these efforts, meant to tighten control in countries of destination, have led to higher 'costs of entry' for irregular migrants and asylum seekers seeking entry into Europe. As a result, smuggling in migrants has increased dramatically during the last years, with the implication that thousands of them fall victim of criminal networks for clandestine transport. This also implies that several hundred smuggled migrants perish each year as a result of perilous attempts to enter or cross EU countries. Such is the tragedy of the so-called 'boat people'.

Mr. Chairman.

Malta has been suffering from this plight of human tragedy in recent years. Figures published last month indicate that by the end of October, over 1100 irregular immigrants landed on Maltese shores, of whom 700 reached our coasts during the summer months alone. For Malta, with a population of just 400,000, these figures tax our resources and

absorptive capacities to the limit. Most irregular immigrants present themselves without travel documentation, in an attempt to conceal their nationality and point of origin. Once detained, they apply for refugee status and remain in Malta until their application is processed. All the while, Malta provides them with all the humanitarian assistance they deserve, including adequate medical care, shelter, food, clothing. Bearing in mind that the process for granting of asylum or refugee status is time-consuming and that these people usually carry no documents, their 'detention' in Malta can on some occasions take months. Detention centres currently host around 600 irregular immigrants. Inter-ethnic tension among the detained immigrants requires constant monitoring and policing. All such instances require delicate handling, as mishandling can have serious consequences. With numbers constantly on the increase, Malta's capacity to retain and manage these irregular immigrants has been put under severe strain. It is evident that the island cannot absorb them without limit as space is restricted and resources strained. *The magnitude of the problem goes beyond Malta's capacity to deal with it single-handedly, indefinitely.*

Mr. Chairman.

'*Malta hanina*' is sparing no effort to address this modern-day tragedy, in full compassion with the humanitarian dimension of the problem – thereby protecting those persecuted on account of their political or religious beliefs. It equally stands committed to continue strengthening its border controls and ensure that criminal networks involved in illegal immigration are effectively detected and punished.

At the international level, Malta will push for a concerted Euro-Mediterranean effort at containing irregular migration flows. To this end, besides collaborating closely with its immediate neighbours to its north and south, Malta is taking an active approach within the European Union to explore avenues and collaborate on joint approaches and methods particularly within the framework of the EU Justice and Home Affairs to stem these flows. Passing from words to deeds, Malta is offering to host the proposed EU Border Control Agency foreseen for 2005, intended to boost the fight against irregular immigration by co-ordinating national border controls. In this respect, Malta welcomed the European Commission's commitment to negotiate re-admission agreements with a number of countries for the return of illegal immigrants and the EU's declared intention to develop partnerships with third countries, particularly in Africa – their main point of origin. Malta welcomes the recently proposed notion of a Mediterranean Convention to discuss regulating immigration in co-operation with countries of origin, transit and destination within the EU, building, as it were, on the EU's existing immigration agreements with some of its neighbours which are already working effectively. In our view, this could serve as an international 'eye-opener' for would-be migrants wishing to work in Europe legally but not aware of the possibilities.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, migration is perhaps one of those strands of the human dimension of security which comes into clear perspective particularly within the Mediterranean region, where points of origin, points of transit and points of destination, converge. A forward-looking and concerted management of this convergence, together with our collective understanding of the challenges and opportunities attached to it, should seriously engage us in our future work. The firm intention of the Slovenian OSCE Chairmanship to focus on this issue next year, is reassuring.

Thank You.