

Address by the Honourable Tonio Borg Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice and Home Affairs of Malta the Hon Tonio Borg at the 5th ASEM Meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam

Mr Chairman
Dear colleagues

This an eventful occasion for my country attending the first summit of this kind following our admission into the European Union last May. A lifelong dream has come true and Malta the smallest state within the Union takes its proper place as a European partner in this important, and may I add, useful Forum bonding two great continents which need each other and are looking for new avenues to cooperate in a more meaningful manner.

The scourge of terrorism of an international or domestic type has left no one unscathed for either a country has been hit by it or lives in the fear or threat that it might; both continents have suffered in this respect; this threat should be examined not only in relation to its political consequences but also as regards the economic and social ravages that it leaves behind; flourishing economies may be dismantled, developing ones hindered in their road to progress; since both continents are passing through a phase of onward development, this threat needs to be affronted from several separate angles; not only through the formal signing of international legal instruments which ensures the exchange of information and the hounding of these new barbarians, but also the establishment of proper and immediate channels of communications, the ongoing sharing of risk assessments and threats in both geographical areas; it would also not be amiss if experts in this field meet more regularly to push forward for Global Convention against Terrorism as suggested in the Draft Declaration

In the same way as Ministers for Economic and cultural affairs of all state partners in this Summit meet to discuss the challenges which face them, so the interior ministers of all participating states need to establish a dialogue which transcends management by crisis in favour of a more permanent response to today`s from of unbridled barbarism; an atmosphere of fear has been created which is hampering development; when children are used as targets and fodder to achieve a political aim, and victims are murdered in the most horrible fashion- all this transmitted in almost a direct and live way-, our standards of values are shattered; there seem to be no rules, no limits to the horrors which we hear of, alas on regular basis.

By putting this fight against terrorism as a top priority in our agenda, we shall be able to create a more stable environment so necessary for development in all fields.

In this respect, may I touch upon another subject which is causing instability in the region where my country is situated namely the Mediterranean. The widening gap between rich and poor countries guarantees a spontaneous movement of persons from Africa to Europe. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants are ready to make their north-bound journey across the Mediterranean in search of a better future. In this process the floodgates of Europe at the peripheral states, Malta included, are being subjected to enormous pressure. More than 1100 persons have the shores of our island which is only 3300 square kilometres in size. The smuggling of persons must therefore be combated in order to retain stability at the frontiers of Europe. The European Union has repeatedly stated that it does not intend to build walls to encircle a fortress Europe. Millions of regular migrants have established their roots in Europe. The recent Directive granting important rights to migrants who lawfully reside in a member state of the Union for at least five years is ample proof of this; but unregulated migration cannot be tolerated. Indeed it is proving to be a lucrative source of illegal revenue to organised crime as beneficial to them as the narcotic trade; which is why the UN Convention against Organised Crime in its Protocols enables the signatory states to combat the smuggling of human beings regarding it as a modern form of human exploitation.

The Declaration rightly refers to the importance of dialogue and co-operation among cultures and civilizations. This is a confidence-building measure, one which ensures a people-to-people approach in the relationship between states, avoiding misunderstandings and promoting tolerance; we are usually afraid of that which we do not know; in the absence of knowledge and contact between cultures, differences are imagined as being larger than in fact they actually are. Malta is the first European country to host a Chinese Cultural Institute inaugurated only recently; such openings and opportunities should not be missed; this example of cultural links between one of the smallest states in the globe and one of the largest is ample proof that there are no limits or boundaries to the exchange of cultural influences and dialogue between civilizations. Indeed, Malta and the People's Republic of China have fostered such relationship, while respecting our differences, for three decades. Tourism is also a means of establishing tolerance between nations whose peoples get to know each other better; in this respect we need to dismantle barriers to this form of contact between our peoples.

The enlargement of this Summit to encompass thirteen new member states is a signal of energy and vitality; indeed the time may soon come when further enlargement will become necessary; as to the alternative between deepening and widening, this discussion also took place within the European Union especially for the last ten years; the enlargement has also resulted in a deepening of the Union as is witnessed by its new Constitution which will be signed this month. One must be careful not to use deepening as a pretext to postpone new members; but deepening and enlargement should move in parallel

fashion. In so doing we shall revitalize the ASEM process and ensure that it always becomes more representative and therefore always more meaningful.