Dear colleagues, dear members of MESCE, it is my pleasure to greet you all and to be with all of you here today.

MESCE is a relatively young regional society, however, it has been incredibly active and in a very short time-period, we have achieved very much. In only three or four years of MESCE’s existence, the society managed to be the host of the XIII World Congress of Comparative Educators. I am unaware of any other comparative education society that managed to tackle such a great feat in its early years of existence, and to carry out such a significant project and event as was the World Congress!

It all started with the idea nurtured by a certain number of academics from Italy and other Mediterranean countries during a meeting in Catania, Sicily, in February 2004. It was through their unique enthusiasm, will and dedication that MESCE was formed. One of the people from this group responsible for forming MESCE and its great success in the early stages is indeed Giovanni Pampanini, the first President of MESCE. From this point on, all activities were carried out as if the society had existed and actively worked for years, and not as if the society had just been formed. The wish that was present for a long time, and that many individuals-experts nurtured, enabled our society to go through a period of childhood relatively quickly and to soon reach proper maturity.

The Congress in Sarajevo, entitled Live Together – Education and Intercultural Dialogue was definitely an activity that underlined the maturity of MESCE and the ability to gather everyone, to step up efforts and focus all the society’s strengths on one very important and responsible task – the World Congress. The Congress gathered over 800 participants from 74 countries around the world, within 13 thematic groups and a number of meetings, introductions, dialogues, and information sharing activities. It brought people together and fostered friendships that resulted in a strong scientific contribution being made to comparative education throughout the world today.

MESCE successfully withstood the capability test. It was shown that this is an organisation that can carry out very well its tasks, a view reinforced by many of the congratulations for a well organised congress that have been received and are
still being received in Sarajevo, the host city, and specifically the University of Sarajevo.

This is also not all! Our society will also be the host of the next XIV World Congress, with the host venue being Istanbul in Turkey, which is one of the founding members of MESCE. Actually, the rather young Turkish society of comparative educators, one of the MESCE’s members that was formed less than two years ago, will be the host organisation. The WCCES’s agreement to have MESCE organise both the XIII and XIV World Congresses testifies to the Council’s trust and faith in our young society. This is a great honour and fills us with pride.

We now can ask ourselves, ‘Are these decisions coincidental?’ Or, ‘Why did MESCE as a former and future organiser of WCCES have an advantage over other regional societies that could have been potential organisers?’

We can seek out the answers in many directions and levels, but before we proceed to do so, why don’t we look into what the Mediterranean means and what this region encompasses.

The Mediterranean in its geographic, natural, environmental, national, cultural, linguistic, religious and many other characteristics has always represented a small world in a given region. The Mediterranean, in the past as well as the future, served as a paradigm of complexity, diversity and mutual differences that are constantly linked into one area, or are included in one area, designated by the sea basin. The Mediterranean Sea has an impact on all of the countries it belongs to, all of the nations, peoples, religions and cultures, making their life unique, special and specific. Mediterranean is a paradigm of parallel diversity and uniqueness, multi-formed and simple, all the while being complex in its content, but being unified through the one and most important element – the sea. This sea is the same throughout, throughout all of the countries where the waves of the sea meet the shore in the same manner. The spirit of the sea, and the spirit of mild and pleasant climate, the spirit of life that arises from the sea, had enabled all the people around this sea, no matter how different, to have one thing in common.

Each individual throughout the Mediterranean region has something within her or himself that we can recognise, as a central factor of stability, making this a specific human trait marking a region, something that we can probably pin-point and identify as the love toward the Mediterranean. This love is the driving factor, the motivating force that leads the people to gather, to socialise, to co-operate, to engage in dialogue and to promote multiculturalism in order to promote further in this region social, cultural and humane values.

Throughout the centuries some of the greatest contributions to civilization have been made all along the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea, and we wish to ensure that this contribution will continue in the future. This is allied to the wish
that all misunderstandings, intolerance, lack of understanding and wars become a distant past in this region, and that education will use its great force to support the development of tolerance and prosperity. Through the well-established communication and academic exchanges in the Mediterranean region, we can help create a common area of shared well-being, which once again relies on the efficiency and success of MESCE as one of the pillars that provide the foundation to help develop co-operation in the area of education, the strongest tool for tolerance and peace. During the next few days in Malta, we shall continue with our constructive, expert and scientific dialogues that should be of benefit not only to our regional educational efforts, but also our relationships and the relationships of our countries and cultures in their entirety.

We owe a special thanks to the University of Malta for organising the III MESCE Conference, and most importantly to Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo, without whom our work today would be difficult to imagine!

Once again, I wish you all a lot of prosperity and success throughout your work, and for all of us to continue to do an excellent job as members of MESCE!