



## Valletta: The Pride of what makes us a Maltese and European Nation

*(speaker's notes)*

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1. Why the title ? Because Valletta is one of those special features of our island nation that brings us together, that merges us into one nation, that brings out in the open our character, our values, our identity our history - all those ingredients that make us what we are and that distinguish us from other nations and other peoples surrounding us. The architecture, the style, the successes and the failures, the beautiful and the ugly, the social mix, the economic mix – all this showcases our own identity. This is why I emphasise the sense of pride that we should all have in our capital city and which must continue to propel us towards 2018, 2020 and beyond.
2. A quick look at the past and the present : I speak as a Vallettan. I speak as a Maltese that is today proud of a capital city in which I lived during my childhood and my youth, in which I worked during my adulthood as a professional and as a politician and in which I enjoy savouring what is happening in my country which is today a proud European Nation and which in 2018 will celebrate Valletta as the European capital of culture.
3. Has Valletta changed and has it changed for the better ? Yes. A vast amount of restoration works have been carried out and key buildings have today been restored to their former grandeur (inside and outside) : Castille. St John's Cathedral. Castille Place, the Chapel of St Catherine of Italy, the Chapel of Our Lady of Victories, Upper Barrakka etc. I salute all the hard work carried out in previous years especially those started by the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee.
4. In 2004 I and my colleagues envisioned a 20 year project. I could summarise the objectives into the following three main ones : instilling a sense of national pride by upgrading our capital city; making it attractive for people to live and work in by strengthening its function as a social and economic hub of activity (which pulls visitors through the three access points of Valletta via City Gate, Via Grand Harbour and the lift to Upper Barrakka and via the ferry from Sliema to Marsamxetto Harbour); and finally making Valletta our own **permanent** Capital of Culture.



5. Of course, making Valletta liveable for residents and visitors alike is a priority. It is true that a process of gentrification has started and is growing in momentum. It is also true that it is vital for Valletta to keep its residents and to attract new families especially young ones. But to do so requires acknowledgement of the very special challenges that Valletta faces, namely :
  - a. Construction or restoration works in Valletta are more expensive than anywhere else;
  - b. Old residential property of architectural or historical value requires much larger sums of money to restore.
  - c. Accessibility in Valetta is restricted
  - d. Gentrification has meant that the value of property has sky rocketed and will probably continue to do so.
  
6. However the reality is simple : keeping and attracting residence can only happen if Valletta becomes attractive in the first place. There is no reason why a young couple would ever dream of wanting to live in a place which is dead, which is decrepit and which fails to instil a strong sense of “proud” belonging. It must also offer an investment opportunity for whoever decides to buy a residence in Valletta and intends to live in it.
  
7. Of course this means that there must be counter measures that facilitate, encourage and incentivises people to reside in Valletta. There could be a whole toolbox of measures to achieve this such as : tax incentives for first time buyers who purchase property in Valletta and live in it for a minimum number of years; special grants for restoration works; special benefits for children of parents who live in Valletta ; a social development plan to improves physical accessibility to Valletta (street escalators) and (perhaps) environmental measures such as allowing ONLY electric cars into Valletta.
  
8. Apart from these social aspects, the 20 year project for the future of Valletta can be said to be divided into three separate parts : the first is 2/3 complete. It focuses on the upgrading of the entrance to Valletta stretching from Castille Place to the entrance to the city. Of course it builds on the work that was done in preceding years. But it still lacks the completion of the Renzo Piano project regarding the ditch, the roofing of the Floriana car park, the restoration of the Tritons fountain and the open area at the entrance to city gate from where all buses should be removed.



9. The second part deals with the heart of Valletta – St George’s Square and the Grand Master’s Palace. The first stage is complete (St George’s Square). The second stage can kick in. It envisages the full and complete restoration of the Grand Master’s Palace and transforming it into a showcase of those jewels in our crown : often the topics of Patrimonju’s exhibitions.
  
10. The third part deals with the three end points of Valletta. St Elmo/MCC/Evans, Upper Barrakka and the lift and Marsamxetto harbour. The most challenging is St Elmo and its use AND upgrading & conversion of the Mediterranean Conference Centre Theatre. The choice and the decisions on this site are crucial because the objective must include activities that attract the flow of people and residents down towards the area on that side of the peninsula.
  
11. A budget of €100 Million – a time span of ten years – but an outcome that makes us proud to be Maltese.