

# Adding global value

By **LOUIS GRECH**

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF MALTA



**LOUIS GRECH** is the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Affairs and Implementation of the Manifesto. Between 2004-2013 he served in the European Parliament. He has a Masters from the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. Mr Grech was one of Air Malta's pioneers, serving as CEO and Chairman of the Air Malta Group, Chairman of Lufthansa Technik, and a director of the board of several companies. His awards include the Tourism Personality of the Year in 2002 and Best MEP in 2007.

**M**ark Twain once said about himself that "rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated!" Rumours of the death of the Commonwealth have similarly always been grossly exaggerated. Yet, it is now 66 years old. More than that, in recent years the Commonwealth has done much to modernise and tune itself into today's world.

It is therefore my pleasure to extend the welcome of the Maltese Government and our people to HM Queen Elizabeth II, the Heads of Government and all the delegates who are attending the Commonwealth Summit in Malta this year, and to augur that this 23rd meeting will achieve the objectives set for it.

This year's meeting is being conducted under the theme "Adding Global Value". Certainly, it is about time that we exploit the Commonwealth's strengths in the international arena to influence political issues and bring about change on important global trends. But, more than that, many feel that that we can have a positive impact on the lives of millions of Commonwealth citizens.

Personally, I hope that our Heads of Government will succeed in committing the Commonwealth to an ambitious policy agenda that bequeaths to our young people a life of liberty, dignity and prosperity. The Commonwealth can also add to global values through its programmes and initiatives.

The Commonwealth is a fascinatingly diverse group of countries. Its members range from some of the largest countries in the world to some of the smallest island states, and from some of the richest nations to some of the poorest in the world. It is this diversity which gives the Commonwealth its greatest strength and a unique ability to contribute to solutions to many of the world's current challenges.

Every year we celebrate the essence of this organisation, one that embraces so many different economic, historical, religious, political and different backgrounds. In itself, it is quite a feat to be a member of a community of nations with so many unique features, embracing people living in 53 states spanning six different continents.

Here we need to re-affirm the unifying spirit of the Commonwealth – a spirit that breaks through many social, cultural and economic barriers and attains union through diversity. The Commonwealth is not just any

ordinary organisation, but a unique tool for all its members to share and practise the key values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter.

The Commonwealth Charter sets out the Commonwealth's core values and commits its leaders to upholding democracy and human rights, promoting tolerance and respect, protecting the environment, providing citizens with access to health, education and food and recognising the positive role of young people in promoting these and other values.

The Commonwealth's focus on the importance of democracy and the respect for core values creates the conditions in which businesses can prosper, by giving them confidence to invest and trade. This in turn creates more jobs and drives greater prosperity. It is critical that we work collectively to raise the Charter's profile and ensure that its values are upheld across the Commonwealth.

Earlier I made reference to our young people. The majority of the Commonwealth's population is under the age of 30. When I met Secretary General Kamallesh Sharma last November on the occasion of the launching of CHOGM 2015, I had expressed the belief that the hope for a future sustainable Commonwealth architecture depended on youth and their motivation to change, reform and break barriers.

I believe one of our challenges is to make the Commonwealth more visible to its young people. In this context, I would like to pay tribute to the work of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP). Since its foundation in 1973, the CYP has worked diligently on youth empowerment.

This year the Youth Forum's theme is "Adding Global Value – What Next?" During this forum, around 400 delegates, not just from the Commonwealth, will convene to discuss how young people can contribute and add value to upholding and enhancing the Commonwealth Charter.

I encourage the delegates to discuss and agree a way forward how the Commonwealth can help achieve the goals of the UN High Level Panel post-2015 development agenda. The ultimate aim is to eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development, thus meeting the outcomes of the Commonwealth's Strategic Plan 2016-17.

I am particularly glad that CHOGM 2015 will see the creation of a brand new Women's Forum, sitting

alongside the already established Youth Forum, Business Forum, and People's Forum.

"Women Ahead: Be All that You Can Be", the theme chosen for this inaugural Commonwealth Women's Forum, shows the organisation's support for the empowerment of women. We all recognise that the one billion women who live in the Commonwealth have the potential to change their own economic status, as well as that of the communities in which they live, and to enrich the life of those around them. Yet, rampant inequality between women and men continues to hamper women's ability to improve their lives.

I must also mention this year's Business Forum in Malta, whose theme is "*Creating a More Prosperous Commonwealth*". The idea behind it is to seek to provide Commonwealth business and enterprise with a valuable bridge into the European Union and the wider Mediterranean region.

The Commonwealth's combined GDP has more than doubled in the last twenty years. It contains some of the fastest growing economies that will shape the global economy of the future. With a middle class that has expanded by nearly one billion people in the last two decades, and a population that accounts for 30 per cent of the global population, there is no doubt that the Commonwealth is a natural place for doing business.

A massive amount of trade is generated every year within the Commonwealth. The relative importance of intra-Commonwealth trade has also grown significantly. According to some studies, the so-called 'Commonwealth effect' provides member states with a trade advantage of between 20 to 50 per cent when trading with other Commonwealth countries. It is estimated that more than half of all Commonwealth countries now export over a quarter of their total exports to other Commonwealth states.

The Commonwealth also provides ready-made links to other international networks, offering huge scope for partnerships within the Commonwealth to help us all to compete in regional and international markets. The Commonwealth's connections, economic growth and commitment to free trade have the potential to contribute significantly to the prosperity of its members. This potential, though, can only be tapped if we encourage the right conditions for business by removing barriers to trade.

But trade is not the only way to increase prosperity within the Commonwealth. The needs of some of our Commonwealth partners are great. One third of the Commonwealth's two billion people still live on a meagre income. It is astounding that millions of Commonwealth children have never seen the inside of a classroom. For many member countries, Commonwealth Development support is vital.

It is often the case that the people who benefit

from the Commonwealth's programmes are not even aware that they owe it to the organisation. Too little information on the Commonwealth is available and its purpose is not explained properly.

I believe that it is time to develop a more targeted communications strategy to promote in an effective manner what this community of nations stands for. We could also strengthen the Commonwealth's role by facilitating the exchange of information in many areas.

Some people overlook the fact that the only three EU member states that are also in the Commonwealth are the United Kingdom, Malta and Cyprus. The Government of Malta believes that in this regard we have a strategic role to play. Just like in the various EU fora we make it a point to bring to the fore the Mediterranean dimension that can sometimes be overlooked by the larger member states. We do not ignore the Commonwealth perspective.

We are fortunate that the nature of the Commonwealth is such that we can discuss Mediterranean affairs against the background of developments in Africa, arising issues in Asia, and opportunities in the Caribbean, whilst discussing competing priorities within the European dimension.

It is relevant at this stage to refer to the Migration Summit that Malta hosted earlier this month. The vast majority of leaders of EU member states attended the Summit, together with a large number of representatives of African countries, some of whom will be present at this year's CHOGM.

The Summit has clearly recognised that the first priority in this human tragedy is to save lives, together with a firm commitment to respect international obligations and human rights. It has also recognised the high degree of interdependence between Africa and Europe, as we face common challenges. There was an overall agreement to address the root causes of irregular migration, and to advance legal migration and mobility possibilities. Equally, a stated paramount objective is to rekindle hope, notably for African youth.

I am certain that all of the above match the very spirit and essence of the Commonwealth. The members who are attending this CHOGM meeting will easily relate to these declarations and should lend their full support to the outcome of this Migration Summit, since only a global solution will really address the problem of migration.

We are certain that the Commonwealth still has significant value to offer, but we also believe that it needs a major revamp to make it relevant and meaningful. It needs a sense of strong ownership and leadership to give it a much needed thrust into the realities of the twenty-first century.

We trust that this Conference will be successful in that respect and will provide an outcome that reflects these much awaited needs.

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