

# A dynamic global player

By DR GEORGE VELLA

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MALTA



GEORGE VELLA

is a doctor of medicine and holds the certificate in aviation medicine from Farnborough. He was first elected to Parliament in 1981. From 1978 to 1987 he served as leader of the Maltese Delegation to the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and subsequently as Malta's Permanent Representative to the Council. In 1996 he was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and again in 2013 when he was re-appointed as Malta's Minister for Foreign Affairs. He is a Grand Commander of the Order of Honour of the Hellenic Republic.

Malta is presently undergoing what is perhaps the most eventful phase in its diplomatic history since its independence in 1964.

As the country continues to consolidate its credentials as a dynamic actor in the European Union and a reliable regional interlocutor, it finds itself at the centre of a flurry of unparalleled activity.

Months of very intensive migration-related discussions culminated last week in Valletta during an EU-Africa Summit which Malta successfully hosted. The fact that the Summit took place in Valletta was no coincidence. Malta's voice was one of the loudest to call for concerted action on migration in the international arena. This was triggered by the dramatic impact that the huge influx of migrants, primarily from Sub-Saharan Africa, was having on local resources and infrastructure and secondly by an impassioned drive to stop the thousands of deaths at sea.

The tragedy that took place on 18 April of this year was a wakeup call for the international community. This, and several other tragedies, could have been averted through a pre-emptive and holistic approach. This migration phenomenon, also exacerbated by developments on a parallel Western Balkans route, must necessarily become pivotal to international deliberations.

It is no secret that our region is troubled by several threats, ranging from hard security pitfalls and economic challenges to outright conflicts. In the midst of this multifaceted unrest, Malta emerges, as it has repeatedly done in its colourful history, as a reliable and dependable harbour of consistency and stability.

Perhaps no other single crisis has borne more evident repercussions on Malta than the one in Libya. Less than one hour's aeroplane flight from Malta, Libya has long been a political and trading partner for Malta. We stood by the Libyan people during the Revolution in 2011 and took very important decisions to ensure that the aspirations of a suppressed population ultimately prevail.

As matters transpired, the circumstances on the ground were far more complex than anyone had expected. The situation was characterised by deep dividing lines of a political and tribal nature and the intervention by the international community did not suffice to bring Libya to its feet. What finally emerged was a political vacuum which, up to this very day, has not been filled by a government that unites all Libyans.

This instability has resulted in the increased volatility of the entire Euro-Mediterranean region, perhaps also fomented by the apparent unwillingness or inability of the international community to take decisive action.

No country is comfortable with having a war zone so close to home, and Malta, very early on, felt the need to bring to the fore the unfolding and dramatic events that were taking place.

I have personally maintained direct contact with decision-makers within the internationally-recognised government and other players, and have persistently called on them not to abandon the efforts led by the United Nations and, more importantly, to refrain from taking any unilateral action that could result in a further violent conflagration.

We are now at a very delicate stage which will hopefully result in the formation of a government of national consensus: a government which, once established, will need to address fundamental priorities that are a *sine qua non* for a stabilised Libya.

A nation-wide reform of the security sector, the establishment of the rule of law and a revived economy that meets its full potential will require international assistance. We are already on the right track on this particular front.

Malta will stand by the Libyan people in meeting the daunting challenges that lie ahead.

The Middle East Peace Process – or lack of it, as most would agree – is bogged down by palpable and deep mistrust between the two parties. Most would agree that we are looking at a very bleak picture.

Malta's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been clear and consistent for many years. We have been steadfast in supporting the right of the Palestinians to achieve statehood and we remain hopeful that Israel and Palestine can continue engaging in meaningful direct negotiations which will eventually bring them to their much-anticipated conclusion that would see the realisation of the two-state solution.

The urgency is clear and escalating and the commitment by the international community to the two-state solution with Jerusalem as a future capital of two states must remain unwavering.

The search for stability in the Mediterranean will lie at the heart of another notable opportunity that lies at Malta's doorstep. Starting from 1 January 2017, Malta, for the first time since EU membership in 2004, takes

over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for a six-month period.

Fully aware of the responsibilities carried in this capacity, the government has embarked on a nation-wide exercise that also involves heavy investment in our infrastructure and resources, apart from the setting of the key policy priorities that would broadly steer the European Union's direction.

Conscious of the effort and coordination this assignment entails, our Presidency kicks off in a few weeks' time as our colleagues in The Hague take the baton. Work is already smoothly and surely underway with the other TRIO partners, the Netherlands and Slovakia to ensure continuity and consistency.

True to its Mediterranean distinctiveness, Malta will focus on existing and emerging challenges in the region, aimed primarily at the stabilisation of partners in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood from the political, economic and social perspectives.

That said, this regional focus will also be counterbalanced by continued attention to developments in Eastern Europe. The events surrounding the Ukraine crisis have rightly turned the spotlight on the region more broadly. During the term of our Presidency, we will be contributing to the Eastern Partnership with a view to further consolidating relations at a pace and in a tone determined by the partners themselves, and addressing any misconceptions by third parties that this is a zero sum game.

We will also be investing in enhanced relations with prominent representative bodies such as the League of Arab States, and closer ties with China, the US and Russia as key strategic partners. The opportunities linked to the Western Balkans will also be given due attention, not exclusively from the enlargement point of view but also as a continued motivation for the reform presently underway.

We will also be concentrating our efforts on an effective review of vital EU tools like the European Neighbourhood Policy in full respect of the priorities set out by the partners themselves.

As Malta enthusiastically braces itself for this exciting new chapter in its diplomatic history, it will remain steadfast in its call for dialogue and engagement between regions, faiths and peoples.

This has been a vocation that Malta has nurtured through the centuries, and it will continue to guide and inspire us in the foreseeable future.

I am convinced that the milestones ahead of us will provide ample opportunities that will reward this time-honoured and honourable resolve.

The hosting, during November 2015 in Malta, of two major gatherings of Heads of State and Government, representing countries from all the regions of the world – the Valletta Summit Conference on Migration

and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) – places Malta in a unique and central role in the enhancement of its credentials in the international political arena.

The Valletta Summit focused attention on the critical dimension of emigration, and brought together the Heads of State and Government of European Union Member States and the countries party to the Khartoum Process and the Rabat Process, as well as a considerable number of Heads of State and Government from African States.

In turn, the Malta CHOGM brings together a wider geographical reach of countries and regions from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Pacific and the Caribbean. The Theme chosen for the CHOGM 2015 – *“The Commonwealth: Adding Global Value”* is especially appropriate and one that heralds new commitments and new opportunities for the citizens of the 53 Commonwealth nations, which represent 2.2 billion people, or almost one third of humanity.

The Malta CHOGM will present an opportunity for the Commonwealth Member States to share experiences and exchange views and visions for stronger and practical contributions to the political values of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government will review the past achievements and failures of the Commonwealth in addressing the ills of our societies and explore how its Member States can add value to the political, economic and social debate taking place at the national, regional and international level and how to address contemporary global challenges.

Global security challenges, development values, climate change, and the relevance and impact of the Commonwealth, are among the agenda items to be considered in-depth by the Heads of Government. The special interest of Commonwealth small states which make up the majority of Commonwealth members will also feature prominently in the deliberations.

The special and invaluable contribution by civil societies will also be one of the highlights of the Malta CHOGM in four fora to take place parallel to the Heads of Government Meeting. The Youth Forum, Women's Forum, People's Forum, and Business Forum, will consolidate the interdependence which exists between Governments and Civil Society, and between Governments and Commonwealth citizens.

As Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth for the next two years, Malta intends to work closely with other Commonwealth Member States and in respect of the values and principles set out in the Commonwealth Charter, to guide the Organisation in using its potential to make it more effective, more relevant and more influential – not only to its members but also to the wider community of nations.

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