

Europe Day 2017

Your Excellency, Minister for Foreign Affairs,

Honourable Ministers,

Senior Officials of the PFDJ, of the Government,

Representatives of international agencies,

Ambassadors,

Dear friends,

Tonight we celebrate Europe Day, the annual reminder of the speech of French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, who, on 9th May 1950, called on the nations of Europe to unite in order to make war on our continent impossible. I wish you all a warm welcome and I would like to express my thanks to Stefano Moscatelli, the Italian Ambassador, who has kindly offered us this beautiful venue in the centre of Asmara. I also want to thank all my colleagues who have contributed to organizing this event, which I hope you will enjoy.

This year is special to us, because about a month ago, on 25th March, the European Union celebrated its 60's birthday – the signing of the Treaties of Rome in 1957. Europe Day is not "EU Day", but the EU has been the main driving force of European integration during the last six decades, as it has grown from a small group of six member states who agreed on limited economic cooperation to a continent-wide organization with 28 members pursuing a broad range of close cooperation encompassing practically all policy areas from economic and financial management to communications, environmental policy, as well as security and defence. It is an organization with 139 Delegations around the world, more than 30 operations launched in

Europe, Africa and Asia since 1999 under the Common Security and Defence Policy, and the biggest investor in international development cooperation as well as the world's biggest humanitarian donor by a wide margin. The European Union is also the world's largest market and a leading global trading partner. Most important of all, the EU is for us the most successful peace project in our history. It has united the countries of Europe fighting two devastating world wars, and it has re-united eastern and western Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Europe Day is a day of celebration, but also a day of reflection on the challenges we are facing today and tomorrow, on what we are and what we want to be. I will return to these in a moment, but let me first say a few words about Eritrea-EU cooperation. It goes back to the early years of Independence – the Delegation was established in 1995 – and it has since steadily developed, in line with the evolving situation in Eritrea and with the specific needs of the country. We have made good progress in the last couple of years: the implementation of the last programs of the 10th European Development Fund is ongoing; we signed last year the National Indicative Program under the 11th EDF and we have finalized a first package of projects and programs under this framework, amounting to almost 90 M€, for approval of EU member states; we hope that implementation of this program can start in the last quarter of this year.

The main components constitute renewable energy, statistics, and the implementation of some of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review on human rights, under United Nations auspices. The Ministry of National Development, the concerned line ministries and my colleagues are also working at additional components of our energy support program,

including possibly the rehabilitation of the electric grid in Asmara and grid-connected solar power. The aim of the overall energy program is threefold: to improve the availability of electricity on the public grid, to expand the availability of electricity into areas in the country-side which are not connected to the grid, and to assist the Government of the State of Eritrea in managing the shift from expensive, hydrocarbon-based electricity production to renewable sources – mostly solar power.

We are also discussing with the Government opportunities for additional cooperation programs under the EU migration trust fund established at the Valletta summit in 2015, or from regional funds under the EDF. The Government commissioned a pre-feasibility study on the rehabilitation of the railway, or the construction of a new one. These are all areas where clear decisions could unlock additional resources.

I am aware that international cooperation is a complex undertaking, because you have to match different and sometimes conflicting bureaucratic rules and regulations, and where you have to find common ground with respect to the objectives. Nevertheless, I am convinced that Eritrea, like any country in the world, can only benefit from international cooperation, as it is exchange and innovation that drive development. There are more opportunities for cooperation out there, not only with the EU and its member states, and the Government should seize them.

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

Now, since this is one of the rare occasions where I can speak publicly about Europe and the European Union, let me share with you some of my reflections. In the last couple of years, the European Union and its basic values

and structures have been challenged in a way that we have rarely seen in our 60-year history:

- We have been challenged by the economic crisis that started in 2008, about a decade ago, and which has caused unprecedented levels of unemployment in some of our member states - which means levels of anxiety and misery for some of our citizens unknown in the last two generations.
- We have been challenged by instability in our neighbourhood that has led to mass migration into and inside Europe unseen since the end of the Second World War.
- We have been challenged within our Union by populist movements which question our fundamental values.
- In addition, the world as a whole has been challenged by environmental problems previously unknown in recent human history – climate change, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable levels of pollution of the air, water and soil as a consequence of rapid industrialization.
- And while new technologies can provide solutions to these problems, we are also challenged by technological developments that put into question our very existence: the destructive capacity of nuclear weapons, the uncertainties of genetic manipulation, and the risks of artificial intelligence.

Human beings, like never before, resemble the "sorcerer's apprentice", a metaphor masterly portrayed by the great German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: We, as human beings, are capable of manipulating nature but without knowing whether we can control the dynamics that our interventions unleash.

None of these challenges can be tackled by any single country or region in isolation. Security, peace and prosperity depend on international cooperation like never before in human history. I like to see the European Union as an experiment in such cooperation, both within and with the wider world.

Within Europe, EU member states have agreed to a level of cooperation in almost all policy areas which is deeper than in any other regional organization. With the wider world, the European Union is relentlessly promoting cooperation, multilateralism, solidarity, and a rules-based international order. The importance of these objectives can easily be grasped when we recall Europe's descent into catastrophe in the two World Wars, a descent which was caused by the collapse of cooperation and its replacement by aggressive competition, as well as the paralysation and eventual demise of the League of Nations. To all those who look today towards simplistic solutions of nationalism, protectionism and the aggressive pursuit of each country's self-interest, the events that unfolded in Europe in the first half of the 20th century should be an important lesson and a warning.

But where is the European Union heading to ?

The EU treaty speaks of an "ever closer union", but the Treaty does not spell out the ultimate objective of this union; and without knowing the destination of our common political journey, we cannot assume that all citizens of all member states are willing to embark on it. Last year, the people of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland took the drastic decision to leave the European Union. The process of disentangling what is a long-standing and deep integration will no doubt be challenging, but in my opinion, we should avoid speaking of a "divorce" and look at it rather as a

process of rearranging of a relationship, based on two fundamental principles: First, that we continue to share with the United Kingdom a wide range of values and interests, and that both sides want to continue cooperating in various policy areas; and second, that the European Union, from its beginnings, has grown out of voluntary adhesion and not by conquest, so the logical consequence is that continued membership must also be voluntary. We do not want to impose ourselves, neither internally nor internationally. We want to be a Union that convinces and inspires by our values, by the resilience of our societies, by the strength and adaptability of our economy, by the diversity, freedom and tolerance which are unequalled in the world.

But in order to continue doing so, in order to maintain our standards of living and our liberties in the face of challenges from security, migration, as well as from the inequalities of a rapidly changing global economy, we have to define the way forward and mobilize our populations towards a desirable common future, a future that also redefines the role of the European Union in the emerging, and sometimes chaotic, multipolar world. That is the bigger challenge that the future 27 member states are facing today.

With the upcoming departure of the United Kingdom, the borders and the internal dynamics of the European Union will change. But this is not a loss, it is a sign of flexibility, and as such, a strength, not a weakness. The power and resilience of a political entity eventually does not lie in its geographical scope, but in its ability to deal successfully with social, political and economic realities, within its own borders and beyond.

I thank you for your attention, I wish you an enjoyable evening, and I propose a toast to the government and the people of Eritrea !