

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is for me a great pleasure to address this workshop: Port-Net “Ports, Tourism And Culture”, and on behalf of the Malta Maritime Authority I welcome you to our islands.

Since Malta is a group of islands on the periphery of Europe, and cannot boast of any natural resources, its economy is mainly services-oriented. Hence there is an emphasis on regular importation and exportation of products. Ports are the life-link for the Maltese Islands. The importance of maritime activities has increased concurrently with the development of the manufacturing and tourism industries, and international shipping services. The main benefits for the economy include the generation of foreign investments and employment. According to recent studies, maritime services in general contribute to circa 13% of our GDP.

Through time, our ports have developed strategies that attract commercial activities and have adapted themselves to meet the new exigencies and requirements of the Maltese islands. However, in the last 20 years, this sector has increased through the implementation of various initiatives and investments in transshipment facilities, cruise business, yachting, ship repair and bunkering services. All these initiatives have contributed towards upgrading the ports and potentially turn the Maltese ports into a hub or rather an important strategic link between the different ports and shipping traffic routes around the world and between southern Europe and the EuroMed countries.

Over the last 5 years the number of ships calling in Maltese ports have increased by 2% reaching over 6,700 ships per year, while the corresponding gross tonnage has increased by over 20%. This clearly shows that local ports have to cater not only for the increase in volumes, but more importantly for an

increase in the size of vessels. This has been mirrored by increases in cargo and passenger throughputs.

Shipping traffic has also grown in the anchorage areas around Malta, which are primarily used by vessels receiving bunkers, carrying out minor repairs, effecting crew changes or receiving supplies and provisions. This kind of traffic has more than doubled during the last 5 years, and now amounts to almost 3,000 vessels per year.

With the introduction of bigger ships, an increase in speed and more efficient loading/unloading systems, maritime transport is becoming even more competitive. This efficiency is reflected in increases in the volumes of bulk and containerised cargoes that are being transported by sea.

This international trade is largely conducted through the two international ports – Valletta and Marsaxlokk. The port of Mgarr, Gozo, is used by international vessels only occasionally since the facilities thereat are limited.

The port of Valletta is a multi-purpose port equipped to offer a large spectrum of maritime services including cruise/ferry and cargo berths, specialised grain and cement silos, petroleum installations, bunkering facilities, ship repair yards, ship chandelling, reception facilities and other ship related services.

Moreover, a private yacht marina has been developed in the Grand Harbour. This complements the large marina operated by the Malta Maritime Authority. New privately operated passenger handling terminals has also been developed in the port of Valletta for cruise and ferry passenger activities. These two projects have been complemented with simultaneous initiatives including the restoration of historical sites and the overall rehabilitation of the foreshore that is accessible to the general public.

The port of Marsaxlokk had for centuries been home to a sizeable fishing fleet. Today Marsaxlokk hosts container terminals that handle over 1.6 million TEUs per year, a power generation plant and four petroleum installations. In the meantime it also provides for the needs of the fishing industry and leisure facilities.

The introduction of new shipping trends and large, specialised container vessels meant that, for Malta to take advantage of its position at the cross roads of numerous shipping routes, a new facility for containers had to be built. Marsaxlokk was the perfect location for such facility. In fact today the Malta Freeport Terminal within Marsaxlokk, has developed into a major container terminal in the Mediterranean, equipped with the latest in technology and serving many of the giant operators in the container carrier sector.

Malta is well served with harbours, chief of which is the Valletta Grand Harbour and the Port of Marsaxlokk. The second largest island, Gozo is topographically quite different from Malta. Quaintly attractive for its less industrialised way of life, Gozo can be reached from Malta by ferry-boat from Cirkewwa and Pieta, near Valletta, and by the newly established service by Harbourair Seaplanes linking the Grand Harbour and Mgarr Harbour. Gozo Channel offers a comprehensive RoRo Passenger Service for foot passengers, car and car passengers as well as cargo vehicles, including hazardous cargo.

Malta's economy is mainly services-oriented, focussing on tourism and financial services. The mainstay of the local economy is without doubt the tourism industry, which accounts for almost 40% of the Gross Domestic Product. It is worth pointing out that Malta's strategic position in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea has always brought about a high degree of interest. From a historical perspective it is overtly clear that the colonisers have always

thought of the Maltese islands as being in a favourable position to strengthen their military and strategic position.

Malta's cruise line industry has been blossoming over the last years by bringing over 400,000 cruise liner passengers and over 350 cruise ships last year.

The Mediterranean cruise market is expected to grow by about 33 per cent in the next five years, and 25 per cent in the following five and Malta, through careful planning should be gaining from this growth as well as increasing its sustainable market share.

The total number of passenger visits to all the Mediterranean ports of call was 13.1 million in 2005. Malta's share of this European market stood at 2.6 per cent, which was quite good considering that, the top five countries: Italy, Spain, Greece, France, Norway, and Portugal are all multi-port countries.

Culture in Malta is not only history. Our islands are blessed with a highly active cultural life. Throughout the year there is an amazing array of cultural events going on including performing arts, visual arts, and music among others.

The aim is to improve the quality of life for all citizens through cultural activities and through the strengthening of the tourism, creative and leisure industries.

Heritage Malta is the official agency responsible for the management of museums and heritage sites. During one of the cultural visits, you will have the opportunity to visit the Malta Maritime Museum. As you would expect of a maritime nation, we have plenty of memorabilia charting our seafaring past. This museum relates the stories and documents the facts.

Starting at the grass-root level of community through local clubs and reaching out to Europe and the rest of the world through partnerships and through the

island's foremost institutions – the Manoel Theatre and St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity, the vision is to recognize this wealth and to extend excellence and improve access in all its sectors.

The title of this workshop: Port, Tourism and Culture lend itself to one other dimension that would easily fall within the concept of the City and Port interface. Moreover, recognising the fact that port development projects attract considerable attention by those living near the ports, environmental NGOs and municipalities, even within an EU context the on-going discussion is how to develop a scenario wherein to develop greater awareness towards ports industry amongst the citizens at large.

Particularly in Malta where the ports are in extreme proximity of towns, cities and villages, where ports are restrained with limited hinterland and where ports are located near historical sites, this notion is of utmost importance. In these circumstances it is evidently important to strike a delicate balance between socio-economic needs that result from port development and the overall welfare of neighbouring citizens.

In these respects when developing the respective Development Plans for the ports in Malta it is imperative that any infrastructure intervention takes into consideration the overall impact on the respective neighbouring environment. Any negative impacts would require to be counterbalanced by socio-environmental initiatives. The ultimate root idea in similar specific circumstances is to further ascertain the notion that the ports belong to the cities that host them.

In fact, it was only last Saturday that the Government has launched its "Vision for Malta's Grand Harbour". This vision for the port does not include only industrial projects but caters also for such initiatives for improving tourism and cultural sights, a centre for audio-visual industry, restoration projects and embellishment areas. This clearly goes hand in hand with your topic for this workshop which primarily deals with striking the balance between ports, tourism and culture.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention, I wish you all a successful workshop and I augur that your experience in Malta will be both beneficial and enjoyable.