

The opening remarks from the President of Malta during the Arraiolos 2026 Plenary Session in Slovenia

I sincerely thank Her Excellency President Nataša Pirc Musar for graciously hosting us in the beautiful city of Ljubljana for this year's meeting of the Arraiolos Group.

The themes chosen for our discussion are highly topical, deserving reflection and attention.

Arising out of the ashes of war and seeking lasting peace and prosperity, the EU was established on the principles of solidarity, democratic cooperation, the rule of law, human rights, and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Over the years, the European Union principles of cooperation, shared prosperity, and solidarity have inspired more and more countries to seek Union membership.

Regarding candidate countries that see the EU as their natural home, we must continue supporting them in implementing the reforms necessary for accession, while ensuring that the process remains merit-based, credible, and firmly anchored in the established criteria.

The present geopolitical scenario makes it imperative that the European vision and these ideals at the forefront of our considerations. We must show that Europe is ready to act, assume responsibility, and work with its partners in defence of our shared principles. We must show that Europe can lead and not merely follow. To this end, we must be ready to listen, keeping discussion routes open, identifying common ground for convergence.

Recent geopolitical developments have underlined the need for the European Union to strengthen its capacity to safeguard our common interests, while remaining a reliable and principled international partner.

The EU must continue to be a strong and consistent voice for universal human rights, international law, including international humanitarian law, democracy and the rule of law, as well as the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

We cannot lose sight of the broader challenges before us. Climate change, sustainable development, and food insecurity remain pressing concerns, compounded by conflicts that are disrupting vital maritime corridors and placing additional strain on global trade and food supply systems.

Collective efforts are also needed to make sure that new technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, continue to serve humanity as a whole, and not be another factor that contributes to the widening of the global divide.

The Union's credibility also depends on how its principles are experienced by citizens in their daily lives. Free movement must remain a tangible expression of European integration, underpinned by fair treatment, mutual responsibility and respect for the rules agreed by all Member States.

It is by facing the challenges of our time, remaining united, and applying our principles consistently that the EU can use its strengths to shape a better future and exert a positive influence on the rest of the world.

I thank you for your kind attention.