



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP
SPEECH TO THE LUNCHEON FOR HIS EXCELLENCY DR CENSU
TABONE, PRESIDENT OF MALTA, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA, 16
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President Tabone, Mrs Tabone, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Your Excellencies, distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen. Mr President It is my very great pleasure to welcome you to Australia. As countries of long standing friendships which we have had and with a very large Maltese born component of our population we have been very much two countries who have had friendship with one another for a very long period of time. I am told that almost every family in Malta has some relative in Australia and so when you come here you come to a place where Malta is more than well represented.

The Maltese have made a very significant contribution to this country. It is a strange but true fact that notwithstanding the fact that Malta is a small country it has a disproportionate influence on Australia. This has been the case of other smaller countries too and in the migration program after the war we have seen Maltese born Australians take their places in Australian society and make their way and have their families and then watch them grow up and prosper, to take a more complete place in our society as the children of Maltese people born here.

They have been great contributors and I am sure the Leader of the Opposition won't mind me saying one of the other great virtues we find in them is that they mostly support the Labor party. This is not an exclusive, we don't have exclusivity but we have got more than our fair share. I do not know why that is, but it seems to be a phenomenon which is true. The fact is though many people of Maltese decent have been coming here since about 1810 and down through the years they can be found not just in the capital cities and they seem to congregate in places like Sydney and Melbourne, but also across the hinterland of Australia in the townships and the provincial cities. So they are very much the pioneers of Australia amongst the pioneers of Australia's

economic development; in rural and provincial communities which were small places where they have played a prominent role and of course since the Second World War pioneers in our social development.

We were speaking earlier about the multicultural character of the Australian community and the Maltese community have played no small part in this great social development in Australia and part of the tolerance of the country and part of its sense of commitment to Australia on the part of many immigrants there would be none that have shown a lead more than the Maltese who have come here and called this place their own, their home and built a life for themselves here.

It has been a very substantial and creative role in our society and in the post-War development of our cities and we think that this multicultural development is a unique thing in the world. This is not the only multicultural country in the world but I think we are doing something which is important here, we think we are doing it as well as anyone else and maybe a little better. That we have managed to produce a society which is diverse but in many respects, well entirely cohesive as a community and this is not an easy thing to do, but of course the Maltese have been part of that.

I suppose if anything probably freshened up our relationship it was the strengthening that occurred during the Second World War when Australians helped defend Malta during three continuous years of bombing by the Axis powers and it is a point not well known in Australia that the Deputy Prime Minister was just saying to me that Malta took greater bombings than the city of London and took a tremendous pounding from the Axis powers during the war and of course Australian forces were there to help in the defence of Malta and this again just added another layer onto this history we have together and the fact that we have so many things in common.

Last year your Government announced the issue of a medal to mark the 50th anniversary of the award of the George Cross of Malta to some 2000 Australians who I think, are eligible and as far as I know about 14,000 have taken it up. This was a very nice commemoration and the acknowledgment of the role played by Australians in the defence of Malta in the Second World War and we appreciate that gesture very much indeed.

We were discussing earlier the fact that we are pursuing different paths. In terms of our geography Malta is located in that part of the world where you are an associate member now of the European community and have applied for full membership. In the same way Australia is part of the economic order and linkages of the Asia-Pacific and we are trying to grow Asia-Pacific institutions here and be part of that as you are keen to improve your own institutional links with the European community. This offers a challenge to both of us and we have to think of novel ways in which we may participate more fully in these very large communities and you were telling me Mr President, that you are becoming now a much more service orientated society and building new

industries on the service base which Malta can offer and that led us to talk about air links between Australia and Malta and the fact that we would like to see that succeed and in its succeeding just again with the transmission if you like, the transport system being more convenient than it has been will lead to not just the natural flow of Australians of Maltese origin returning to Malta, but may open up business opportunities for Australian firms participating in the European area using the service facilities of Malta. This is a good and sensible development.

You were talking also about the vagaries of the common market, the development of Maastricht and how the European community might develop with European integration and the integration of the Commonwealth of Independent States more fully in the European family and the challenges which the integration of those states into Europe, the strength of that challenge for European nations to overcome and we see the problems in the post cold-War era with Iraq and with Bosnia-Herzegovina and the problems of the old Yugoslavia already reminding us of the intractability of European problems and European unity. We would think as a full partner of the European community or indeed even as associate members there is again that great common sense of Malta playing a role, having a voice in these very important world affairs as we in Australia are having a role in the development of the Asia-Pacific area and always standing up for sense of democracy and our sense of freedom and human rights which is an important signature which Australia has and which we think we can bring to this part of the world as well.

Beyond those economic, our economic allegiances in terms of the regions we belong, nothing has stood in the way of our friendship other than those thousands of kilometres of sea and of distance and we hope that we can shrink those again. So with Malta as with all those countries from whence the Australian people have come, there is a thread of kinship which is bound to survive our pursuit of our different destinies in different parts of the world.

Mr President, could I say we welcome you most heartedly to Australia. It is great to see you here with your wife and Foreign Minister and we do hope that you enjoy our hospitality, not just the hospitality of the Australian community in the broad, but particularly those of Maltese origin who I know are thrilled to see you visit this country and I am sure as you travel around the country you will find that the bonds between us are very warm and very strong indeed.

Thank you.