

## **Miriam Teuma's opening address**

Good morning.

Before I introduce Mr. Clyde Puli, Parliamentary Secretary for Youth and Sport, I just want to say a few words of thanks and welcome. I hope that you all enjoy your stay here in Malta and that the next few days will give us all an opportunity to get to know each other a bit better, to share our experiences and knowledge, to learn from each other and hopefully begin a process of mutual support and friendship in helping young people and youth organisations in the region play that role in society that they alone can play.

As you may be aware, Agenzija Zghazagh, the Maltese Youth Agency, has now been in operation for a year. As part of our remit we have given particular priority to empowering young people in Malta and have already initiated a youth empowerment programme. Together with EuroMed Youth Platform, we have been anxious to strengthen dialogue and networking in the South Mediterranean region in light of the momentous events of the past year.

At the moment we are experiencing a sea change in the region. Fluidity is replacing rigidity in society, politics and culture. Uncertainty reigns and events are moving more quickly than our capacity to deal with them. The hollowness of the old order has been made apparent for all to see. Economic crisis and political and social turmoil are and will continue to trigger an exodus of young people from the region in search of not only a better economic future but a better quality of life.

Among the many problems with which the region is confronted are the mismatch between education and training systems and the skills/competencies required of the global market economy; the lack among young people of problem solving skills and competency in new and emerging technologies; and a potential brain drain in emerging democracies.

This seminar is a practical example of how we can work together to empower young people take control and together network and come up with ideas on how to react to emerging problems. We hope that it will be the first of many such encounters and opportunities for mutual learning and support. The seminar would also not be possible without the active support and engagement of the other partners: the youth partnership between European Commission and the Council of Europe, the League of Arab States and the North-South Centre all of whom are represented here today. I want to thank you all for your commitment and support for this process.

It is my pleasure now to ask the Hon. Clyde Puli, Parliamentary Secretary for Youth and Sport to say a few words.