

## Speech to welcome Dr Roberta Metsola, President, European Parliament

*Faculty of Laws Room 307 March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024*

Welcome Dr Metsola, in a way it's welcome back since you are a former student and graduand from this very same Faculty. I assure you that a lot has changed since your days here; I am curious when the last time you set foot here was

What has changed, you may ask? Not the tiles or the doors downstairs (you would not know this floor because it was built about ten years ago). Most of the people have changed too, Admin moved on. The academics: Prof Ian Refalo retired less than a year ago, we had a special ceremony for him in this very room last June; on the other hand Prof Tonio Borg, Dr Austin Bencini, Prof Patrick Galea, Prof Simone Borg, Prof Ray Mangion (who could not be here because his daughter graduates MD today), Dr David Fabri, Dr David Zammit, Judge Lawrence Quintano are still here. There are many new faces and names and I promise you that we have a lot of inhouse experts and also very hard working people, we are over twenty full time academics now, and we have changed the Faculty possibly beyond recognition. We have experts in IT Law, in EU Law, Public International Law, Environmental Law.. Medical Law... you name it. Nowadays we are a proper Faculty within a University, not a number of court-goers (nothing wrong with that of course) who come and deliver a few lectures. We publish (I don't know whether you noticed the books on display, they are all written by us, the academics, a far cry from when I was a student and the only book available was Government Liability by the late Judge Wallace Gulia and History of the Constitution since 1813 by Judge Professor JJ Cremona! We are proud of our books, we contribute to journals, we win projects (we have two MCST projects for example, and Dr David Zammit had won a project too now completed while Prof Ivan Sammut won the Jean Monnet Chair which is why we have been trying to invite you for so long. We also win some consultancy work, report writing for different entities, we are even in the process (subject to a number of hitches) of setting up our own journal (a new for the Faculty of Laws).

We still have a lot of students, which to me is not necessarily a bad thing, indeed they are all welcome even if it's a lot of work and stretches our resources; but the amazing thing is that no matter how many students we have, they all find work and there is still a shortage; we have three student organisations (law-related) these being ELSA (Malta), JCA and GhSL; they in the labour market very active and do a lot of sterling work for the student community;

Importantly we have invested heavily in teamwork between the academics. We actually conduct team building exercises which include a half day in September at Mt St Joseph Retreat House – last time we actually brought somebody from the Faculty of Education to give us hints on lecturing techniques and this initiative was extremely well received; we also go on a trip together (optional of course); last November it was less than 48 hours in Brussels which included a visit to the European Parliament where we met your staff too; the days were so long and so packed with activities that it

felt much longer than 48 hours! The Admin staff also hold team building events, with an annual fixture in the Easter Holidays.

We have a lot of collaboration with different entities, and this makes me feel really proud. Different firms ask us how they can collaborate; and I am talking top firms like Ganado; we have book donations (WH Partners just wrote to me offering to buy 1000 Euro worth of books for our library across the corridor); Prof Anton Micallef sponsors an annual competition where students write a 1500-word essay and the prize is 1500 Euro; the Parliamentary Ombudsman sponsors a prize for the best thesis on an ombudsman – related subject; GMX annually sponsor the GMX prize for best dissertation in financial services legislation... the list goes on. We also collaborate actively with overseas universities such as London City to name but one. So I feel really, really proud, honoured in fact at the stage we reached.

Yes I'd be happier if the Faculty of Laws got a new state-of-the-art building in which everybody has their office; this is still lightyears away. I'd also be happier if the higher officials within the UM put the Faculty of Laws on a higher pedestal recognising that the people we train go on to very high places and illustrious careers; we would also be happier if certain suggestions we made for improving our courses were heeded, but we are making steps and happy with the progress. One has to understand the UM too; it does not enjoy the monopoly it once did, in tertiary education. It's a fact, indeed the Faculty of Laws at this point in time though not future proof is not as badly affected as other faculties but nothing is guaranteed so we are trying to deal with this in a proactive manner. It's also a fact that the UM is not in the best place financially, though hopefully things will improve once certain capital projects are concluded.

Oh, and on an EU level, I nearly forgot, we organise an annual trip to the institutions (CJEU and Court of Auditors) where we meet the Maltese judges and also Dr George Hyzler (he assures me of an open invitation) and we try hard to tempt students into taking a stage with an institution; not easy because our students are so sought after locally that I think they simply reason that they cannot afford to go away for six months. Erasmus is also successful, because about 50% of our students actually go on an Erasmus exchange in the fourth year of their studies, in sem one in which there are only elective study units intentionally so that the students will be able to go on Erasmus, or on ISEP (International Student Exchange Programme);

Regarding the Jean Monet chair, I invite Prof Ivan Sammut to say a few words on this but we must keep tabs of the time since you are due to meet the students at 1500 at ALT.