

Dr Joseph Muscat Speech at ESO congress, 18 – 19- 20 April 2012

It is an honour for us to host you here. The Labour Veterans Organisation is one of the essential parts of our organisation and a very active part of our organisation. I think the internalization of their effort is reaping fruit with this conference and I thank the European Seniors Organisation for deciding to have this conference here in Malta. I hope that you would be able to enjoy our good weather and hospitality. Welcome once again to our country.

I won't take long as I think that Dr Formosa has made, as usual, a very good presentation. I believe Marvin is one of our best talents when it comes to talk on this aspect and I think that he is also one of the foremost experts at the European Level. The point I would like to latch upon.. It think that needs to be given more thought when we come to active aging is that of the feminization of aging.

The fact that in most countries , definitely in this country, an increasing large part of our elderly population is made up of women and one of the things I believe needs to be delved upon in detail is not only the flexibility that we need in the services and the social infrastructure that would lead to active aging, be it employment and be it, as Marvin rightly said, volunteering which I think is grossly underestimated, maybe because it is not that easy to calculate and to quantify because there aren't the normal variants and it's very difficult to give a value – a financial or economic value to work which is basically not rewarded in financial terms.

So there is a need, as Marvin is saying, for an infrastructure that values and support volunteer work, especially by the elderly people. And that in ways not only by policies but also in ways that one can make voluntary work a little bit easier in terms of transport. In our case transport is a crucial part because of the increasing costs, because of various difficulties, but also because an increasingly large part of our elderly population is made up of women and obviously we need policies that take into account that fact not only in the preparation for retirement and, the third and eventually the fourth age, but also when it comes to a system that helps women integrate better in active aging.

I am saying that because in our society which is most of it a traditional, conservative , family orientated society, the role of women still needs to be developed further. Women are most of the time engaged in doing such types of voluntary work but they tend to take the back seat, they tend to do the dirty work in the sense that they do most of the work but then they are seen as not taking decisions, are not seen as being on the front line of decision making. I think also that when it comes to active aging we need to promote a culture and structure that would include more women in decision making and more women in the frontline of decisions being taken in this sector.

I think such a great challenge for our country and I also think it's a great challenge for most Mediterranean countries in Europe. think we can look at the example and the lessons that we can learn from our Nordic friends and our friends from the northern part of Europe and I think also it is also a big challenge for the whole of Europe: The feminization of our elderly population.

I saw the agenda of this Seminar. I think it is a very challenging agenda with lots of speakers. I'll limit myself to my time and I wish you all the best and thank you for choosing Malta to host you meeting.