Dear Honourable Minister for Home and Parliamentary Affairs, Dr. Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, host of this important event; Dear colleagues and co-hosts, representatives of the governments of France and Switzerland; Dear representatives of MTM Partner States and Partner Agencies; Dear friends,

I would like, first and foremost, to sincerely thank the governments of Malta, Switzerland and France for making this event a reality. It is due to your commitment and support that we are able to gather today on this beautiful island at the crossroads of Mediterranean cultures.

Ten years ago, the first Director General of ICMPD, Mr. Jonas Widgren, put all his energy into the launching of this initiative that was to become the MTM Dialogue. He chose to propose Malta as the location for the first meeting to gather Arab and European delegates.

The choice was not random, as Malta’s strategic location at the heart of the Mediterranean naturally facilitates exchanges with all neighbours around the Mediterranean and beyond. The rich Maltese culture has been shaped over thousands of years by these exchanges. In this perspective, migration has continuously influenced Malta and keeps on doing so. With proportionally one of the largest diaspora in the world, and one of the highest numbers of arriving migrants per inhabitant, Malta is an appropriate location to talk about migration.

We certainly need to talk about migration, as migration is about the most important issue of all: migration is about people. It is about those who are on the move, about those who remain and about those who receive them in their communities and we have to find solutions for all of them. This evident and essential element is at the heart of ICMPD’s mandate. There are various ways to govern migration, but due to the very nature of migration, its origin, destination and also transit, the first and necessary step is to engage in a dialogue.

With some years of experience as a representative of a European government, I have been involved in many initiatives and efforts to bring together diverse actors with different perspectives on migration in order to define and achieve common goals. It was not always successful at first, much had to be done, innovative thinking was needed and an exploratory spirit was essential.
But over time much has been achieved. Hardly twenty years ago, Europe was divided, the European Union had 12 Member States, and we all but understood our neighbours. ICMPD was created in the direct aftermath of the dramatic but hopeful and promising changes that shook Europe.

The first initiative ICMPD was involved in was the development of the Budapest Process, which facilitated the progressive integration of the participating countries into a common migration framework. Since then much has been achieved. The Europe Union has 27 Member States and the Eastern European States are fully integrated and dynamic members. At the regional level, we have established common institutions and agencies, and some of them are present here today as MTM Partner Agencies or observers. Even though the goals of African, European and Middle Eastern States might be different, the necessary mechanisms towards greater cooperation remain the same, and so does the role of dialogues.

When I took over as Director General of ICMPD in January 2010, it happened that the first major ICMPD-led activity I took part in was the MTM Dialogue, which held an expert meeting in London. I was pleasantly surprised by the dynamism, quality and depth of discussions that took place between MTM Partner States, as well as the key role played by MTM Partner Agencies.

I discovered the extent of the achievements within the MTM, and the specific evolution of this dialogue in action. The MTM Dialogue has accumulated significant experience and has developed innovative methodologies and tools, such as the i-Map. It has built up a certain added value and anchored itself throughout the years as a very useful and beneficial framework.

In the course of the day, we will learn more about the 10 years of the MTM Dialogue in perspective – its place, role and use as an informal, technical and supportive dialogue for major fora. We will have the opportunity to hear the views of countries on what dialogues bring to regional and national migration policy development. We will also hear about new perspectives, in line with the innovative spirit of the MTM, notably, through the proposed new City-to-City dimension. We will benefit from the expertise of a broad range of MTM Partner Agencies, and on this basis look into the future of the MTM.

It is with great pleasure that I take part in this celebration and wish us all fruitful and forward-looking discussions.

Last, but not least, let me take this opportunity to thank the MTM Team, under the leadership of Julien Simon, for their hard work in preparing this event and for their continuous efforts to keep the MTM Dialogue in action.