

## **Remarks reception 17 May**

17 May 2023

As is custom in Lesotho, allow me to pay my respects to:

His Majesty King, Letsie III and her Majesty Queen Masenate

The Right Honourable the Prime Minister, Mr Samuel Ntsokoane Matekane

The Honourable President of the Senate, Mme Mamonaheng Mokitimi

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr Tlohang Sekhamane

His Lordship the Chief Justice, Sakoane Sakoane

The Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Mme Nthomeng Majara

The Honourable Ministers in His Majesty's Cabinet and in particular those who accompany us today and in particular Minister of Finance and Development Planning Retselisitsoe Matlanyane, the Minister of Local Government, Chieftainship, Home Affairs and Police Lebona Lephema, the Minister of Trade and Industry Mokhethi Shelile, the Minister of Labour Employment and Public Service, Richard Ramoetsi, The Minister of Gender, Youth, Sports, Arts, Culture and Social Development, Hon. Pitso Lesaoana, the Minister of Natural Resources Honourable Mohlomi Moleko, and the Minister in Prime Minister Office, Limpho Tau

His Lordship the President of the Court of Appeal

Members of the Council of State

Honourable Leader of the Opposition in Parliament

Their Lordships Judges of the High Court and the Court of Appeal

Their Excellencies Heads of Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations, and in particular the Ambassadors of European Member States, who accompany us from Pretoria

Honourable Attorney General

Honourable Members of the Senate and Principal Chiefs and other traditional leaders

Honourable Members of the National Assembly

Director of Public Prosecutions

Principal Secretaries and representatives of government institutions

Academic and representatives of the business community and of organized civil society

Members of the media

Other distinguished guests and in particular EU junior Ambassador 2023, Maphakisane Letlola

Bo Mme le Bo Ntate, All Protocol observed.

Thank you for joining us today to celebrate a new session of the Lesotho EU dialogue and in parallel Europe Month. It has been a very long day for all participants in the dialogue so my remarks will be brief to allow people to interact informally and celebrate a successful process.

It was my great pleasure to host earlier today with the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, Lejone Mpotjoane, the annual Lesotho-EU Political Dialogue and to be able to discuss in an open and cooperative spirit the partnership that links not only our respective Governments and institutions but also our people. We discussed about the elections and the national reform process, about regional relations, about the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreements and about past and present cooperation. As we look into the future, we are very optimistic that progress can be made towards the adoption of the much awaited reforms, perhaps as soon as next week, and we are confident that we can help Lesotho to engage on a more stable and sustainable path.

As we did last year, we are celebrating different events in the course of the month of May to commemorate the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950. Europe Day is the day that we celebrate peace and the unity of the 27 member states under the European flag. We hold up the Schuman Declaration as an example of how to bring together nations who can work together in peace and harmony. Today more than ever we convene to celebrate peace and solidarity as war is ravaging on our door step and is producing dramatic consequences globally.

As we did last year, we dedicated May 9 to the youth. Last year we celebrated the anniversary of the creation of the Erasmus programme, the EU flagship programme for higher education, this year we engaged youth representatives to formulate their vision for the country to help us shape our future programmes and initiatives in the country.

Europe month is also an opportunity to take stock of our cooperation and launch new initiatives: Today in a demonstration of the EU's commitment to Lesotho we signed three new financing agreements with a total value of 29 million Euros (601 million Maloti), the first agreements signed under our current Lesotho-EU bilateral cooperation strategy 2021-2024. These agreements will assist Lesotho in scaling up renewable energy production and in supporting service delivery to vulnerable children and households. Their implementation is already under way and this morning we signed two contribution agreements with two of our strongest partners, the German Cooperation Agency (GIZ) and UNICEF.

We will conclude Europe month with a meeting with the media community, to which today I would like to express all our solidarity as they grapple with the tragic loss of one of their members.

I invite you to interact with the Ambassadors and diplomats, who have joined from Pretoria today, representing nine of the 27 Member States of the EU. It is the largest contingent that have ever joined us. It demonstrates, once again, the keen interest that so many EU Member States have in Lesotho and in strengthening cooperation with the Mountain Kingdom, beyond the cooperation they extend via the European Union. It is also very reassuring to see such a good presence today from our partners in Lesotho, a clear demonstration of the importance that you also attach to our relationship.

I made the promise to keep my remarks short. I give now the floor to Hon Minister Mpotjoane and I invite you to keep your glass ready for a toast to the Lesotho – EU partnership.

Khotso, Pula , Nala