Speech made my Gian Battista Scrivanti, Chair of Amici di Romsey
4th October, 2026

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first thank all of you for being here tonight and particularly the President of Romsey Twinning Committee, our Mayor and Ms Ciciliot who arranged the several Friday events, Patrizia and Massimo for their help, the Amici who hosted and those who didn't host but contributed in various ways to make this twinning exchange successful.

The TWINNING, right! When we speak about town twinning, it is easy to think of it as something belonging to another generation: delegations visiting one another, official ceremonies, dinners, photographs, and perhaps a twin city plaque at a town entrance.

But town twinning is much more than that. At its heart, town twinning is about **people meeting people**. It is about discovering that behind different languages, traditions and national identities, we share many of the same hopes, concerns and aspirations. It is about building friendships between communities and, above all, building bridges between countries.

And I believe that this **has never been** more important **than it is** today.

We live in a world that is increasingly connected, but not necessarily increasingly **close**. We can communicate instantly with someone on the other side of the world, yet at the same time we can become more isolated from the people around us. Social media allow us to see other cultures, but seeing is not the same as meeting. Reading about another country is not the same as sitting at a table with someone from that country, sharing a meal, laughing together and discovering what you have in common.

Town twinning creates precisely those opportunities. It gives ordinary citizens the chance to experience Europe and the wider world not through headlines or statistics, but through personal relationships.

However, we should also be honest about the challenges we face. One of the greatest difficulties today is **involving new people**.

Many twinning associations were created by people who believed passionately in international friendship and European cooperation. They invested their time, energy and enthusiasm over many years. We owe them enormous gratitude.

But communities change. People move. Volunteers become older. Young families have less free time. And younger generations have grown up in a very different world.

For a young person today, an invitation to join a twinning association may not immediately seem exciting or relevant. They have opportunities to travel, study and communicate internationally that previous generations could **hardly** have imagined.

So we have to ask ourselves: **What can town twinning offer young people today that they cannot find elsewhere?**

The answer should not simply be another meeting or another official programme. We should offer them **experience, friendship, responsibility and a voice**.

Young people should not only be invited to participate in activities designed by older generations. They should be encouraged to help design those activities themselves.

Let them decide what interests them. Let them organise cultural projects, sporting events, environmental initiatives, music and art exchanges, educational projects and digital collaborations. Let them meet their peers, not simply the officials of another town.

Because if two young people from different countries become friends, something important happens. A foreign country becomes less foreign. A different culture becomes familiar. And perhaps a stereotype disappears.

This matters enormously in the world in which we are living. We are witnessing war, political tensions, economic uncertainty, migration, social division and a growing sense of insecurity in many parts of the world. At the same time, international cooperation is becoming more difficult in some areas, and people can increasingly retreat into their own national or social bubbles.

We cannot pretend that a town-twinning programme can solve these enormous problems.It cannot. But it can do something smaller — and perhaps more fundamental. It can create **understanding between individuals**.

Peace is not created only in government buildings or at international conferences. Peace also depends on whether ordinary people are willing to know one another, to listen to one another and to recognise one another's humanity.

A friendship between two towns will not stop a war. But thousands of friendships across borders can help create a culture in which dialogue is valued more than division, curiosity more than prejudice, and cooperation more than isolation.

That is why we should not regard town twinning as a tradition that **we simply have to preserve.** We should see it as an opportunity that we have to **renew**.

We need to ask not only, "How can we keep our twinning association alive?" We should ask, "What should town twinning become for the next generation?"

Perhaps the answer is more open, more inclusive and more imaginative. Perhaps **it means fewer formalities and more opportunities for young people to meet.**

Perhaps it means using technology to maintain relationships between physical meetings, while remembering that technology should complement — not replace — real human contact. And perhaps most importantly, it means giving young people a genuine role in shaping the future of our partnerships.

Town twinning began with a simple but powerful idea: that people from different places can come together and become friends. That idea has not become less relevant with time. In many ways, it has become more relevant.

In a world where it is increasingly easy to divide people into "us" and "them", town twinning reminds us that we can cross borders without fear, learn from difference without feeling threatened by it, and discover common ground without giving up our own identity.

So let us thank those who built these relationships before us. But let us also recognise that their work cannot end with our generation.

However, we are are getting old and fewer so it is becoming harder and harder for us to carry on.

Our responsibility now is to open the door to the next generation. - Fingers crossed!

If we succeed in doing that, town twinning will not simply survive. It will continue to serve its most important purpose: **bringing people together at a time when the world needs connection, understanding and friendship more than ever.**

Thank you.