

Address by Daniel Borg

CEO of the Gozo Business Chamber

25th October 2019

Dear honourable minister, ambassadors, members of parliament, speaker emeritus, INSULEUR delegates and guests. I would like to thank you, and welcome you on behalf of INSULEUR and the Gozo Business Chamber, for joining us for the INSULEUR Forum which will discuss 'The Digital Transformation of European Islands'.

It is not without any trepidation that I make this introductory speech today, for multiple reasons. These past few months have seen intense preparation on behalf of the Gozo Business Chamber, and INSULEUR for today's Forum. Since assuming the presidency of INSULEUR the Gozo Business Chamber has strived to push forward the agenda of islands. Yesterday during the General Assembly we had a very fruitful and intense discussion on state aid for islands, Value Added Tax, and migration. With respect to state aid it is clear that the state aid framework as it is now is too generic to cater for the specific needs and difficulties faced by islands today. We are sure that yesterday we have discussed an effective proposition which will cater both for the needs of islands, and also aligns itself with the goals and objectives of the European Commission. However, in all the topics that we have discussed the main element has been that we must single out the peculiarity of islands, and we must cater for their needs. Furthermore, as islands we must cooperate and join forces so that our voices are heard in international Fora.

I am sure today that with the calibre of the speakers involved, we are also going to have another important day. Digitalisation has many facets:

Digital technologies have brought significant transformation . . . [to industries across the board], revolutionising . . . enterprises, products and experiences, [and] business ecosystems . . . Digitalisation has also transformed the traditional roles of . . . producers and consumers, with new roles, relationships, business models, and competencies emerging. The rise of digital platforms has increased the variety and volume . . . of products, services and experiences, with on-demand functionality accelerating the speed of economic transactions, market awareness and feedback. These shifts have created new opportunities, as well as challenges, [for all types of enterprises] as they strive to meet consumer demands, and reach new markets (Dredge et. al, 2018, p. 1).

But how does this affect islands? Has it brought advantages, or has it increased the inherent difficulties that islands face because of their natural geographical limitations.

In 2015 the European Commission issued 'A Digital Market Strategy for Europe'. The Single Digital Market Strategy sought to address the fragmentation and associated barriers to the development of Europe's digital economy through:

- Creating better opportunities for consumers and businesses to access online goods and services across Europe.
- Encouraging the right conditions for digital networks and services to flourish.
- Maximising the growth potential of the European Digital Economy (Dredge et. al, 2018, p. 8).

This Forum shall explore and discuss on how islands are and can benefit from digitalisation, and also the role of Chambers of Commerce in the whole process. It would not be wrong to say that digitalisation can be that bridge which eventually can help islands make up for the inherent difficulties they face. Many a time islands such as Gozo for example feature only as a side thought on international and national agendas. We must ensure that the reality of islands is taken into account, and this is the scope of the Forum. We are here to learn, but at the same time make our voices heard. While thanking all the speakers and moderators who have accepted our invite, I wish you all a very fruitful experience.
