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**Press Release**

**INSULEUR General Assembly and Forum**

**Gozo (Malta) 24 & 25 of October 2019**

On the 24th and the 25th October the INSULEUR General Assembly and Forum were held at Gozo, Malta. Delegates from Malta, Greece, Spain, France, Italy and, Jersey participated in the events.

During the General Assembly on the 24th October, which was reserved solely for INSULEUR members, core issues such as “Blue Growth and Islands” and VAT regulations arose, while among the subjects having been discussed were a proposal for revisions to the state aid framework that would target islands’ needs as well as the issue of refugees and immigrants.

This year’s Forum was devoted to “the Digital Transformation of European Islands”. In particular, the association and interconnectivity between insular economies and digitilisation was thoroughly examined. Furthermore, keynote speeches included initiatives of insular chambers with respect to digitalization on insular economies and SMEs, and the development of a strategy towards digitalization for EU islands.

On the basis of its proceedings, the Conference recommended that EU islands:

* Raise awareness among society and community regarding the difficulties needed to be tackled;
* Develop a clear understanding of the digitalisation process so that integral elements will function efficiently ;
* Introduce changes in curricula to upskill their human resources;
* Ensure equality of opportunity;
* Find a delicate balance to allow for sustainable innovation and introduce legislation in order to protect sensitive ecosystems and ensure digital security.
* Transform insular Chambers and SMEs through the exploitation of new and innovative technologies;
* Develop place-based strategies to take concrete actions and promote their territorial potential based on a bottom-up approach.

As a final step, a statement of conclusions and Intent on Developing a Common Digitalisation Strategy for EU islands was formulated as the outcome of the Forum. In this terms, the statement recognised the importance and potential of digitalisation for insular economies where digitalisation can serve as a roadmap “to tackle the difficulties that are generally associated with their geographical isolation by developing stronger links with the main centres of economic activity, developing innovative products and services and diversify business activity”.

The Forum was concluded by Joseph Borg, President of INSULEUR and the Gozo Business Chamber. He highlighted the importance for islands to unite in order to make their voices heard at a European level.