



THE GOZO BUSINESS CHAMBER



MINISTRY FOR GOZO



Digitally Connect Islands

MEP Alex Agius Saliba

INSULEUR Forum: Digital Transformation of European Islands

25th October 2019 | Venue: Grand Hotel Gozo

Europe's islands are home to over 21 million people inhabiting 500 European islands. They account for approximately 4% of the EU-28's total population which is the equivalent of the 9th most populated Member State.



European Islands are:

- beautiful
- unique
- resilient
- distinct identity
- unique cultures
- acute specific needs

European Islands

- European Islands are **not a single homogenous category**
- They have their **own particularities and differences** in size, populations, and levels of economic growth
- They face **common challenges** and share specific social, economic and environmental problems

Common Challenges

- Transport and lack of connectivity,
 - Environment and climate change,
 - Size, money, limited access to human capital, social and public services,
 - Unemployment, lack of professional development, and expertise in new emerging fields
 - Limited use of new information and communications technologies (ICTs) and low broadband coverage,
 - Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)
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Malta

- The economic success of Malta as an island state could serve as a model to other islands.
- The accomplishments achieved by our country at the forefront of the digital revolution have placed us on the international stage and surely can provide best practices to other islands and islands states.



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Digitally Connected Islands

- digital economy is growing at **seven times the rate of the rest of the economy**, contributing billions per year to Europe's economy and creating millions of jobs.
- exploring the potentials of **digitalisation and the digital economy** is the way forward to be furthered by all islands.
- **digitally connected islands** can expand their vast potential and transform their geographical handicaps into a golden opportunity.
- the **concept of borders and space in the digital world** is no longer relevant
- digitalisation can make our islands better places to **live, work, and do business in**
- improve **healthcare, education, public order, security, and social services**

Gozo

- Gozo - centre of excellence, research and innovation;
- Memorandum of Understanding will help facilitate innovative investment in Gozo;
- The Gozo Innovation Hub;
- The new fibre optic cable, Gozo;

Digitally Connected Islands

- What do we need?
 - **right conditions and a level playing field** for digital networks and innovative services.
 - **digital strategies** tailored to islands particular needs.
 - developing **physical infrastructure** necessary to connect to the digital environment.

Digital Infrastructure

- islands are still **lagging behind** urban areas in terms of **broadband infrastructure**.
- broadband networks to islands would facilitate **better communications**, improve **access to digital services** and encourage the **development of SMEs** in rural areas, thereby helping to create **new jobs** and develop **new services** in these areas.
 - We need **broadband infrastructure**
 - we need **affordable broadband services**
 - we need **fast broadband network**

European measures:

- **three new connectivity targets** and policy measures to accelerate the roll-out of the next generation of broadband infrastructure (5G).
- **European Structural and Investment Funds**
- **Connecting Europe Facility.**
- **European Regional Development Fund**
- **new Connecting Europe Broadband Fund**
- **European Commission's guide for local and regional entities**
- **The European Investment Bank (EIB)**
- **new WiFi4EU initiative**

Challenges: structural difficulties islands face in with regard to the cohesion policy and new financial instruments to support digital network infrastructure.



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Concluding remarks:

- digital technology and digitalisation of our economy presents **major benefits and potential for island communities.**
- islands can **now connect and interact** in a way that has not previously been possible.
- **grasps the full potential digital technology presents to our islands, our businesses and communities alike.**



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Thank you for your attention!

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Thank You

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