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*Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta during the Malta-Portugal Business Forum, during the State Visit to the Republic of Portugal, 15 May 2018*

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[Salutations]

Dear friends,

Let me begin by reiterating my heartfelt appreciation to His Excellency, my friend President de Sousa, and to the Government of Portugal, for the warm welcome and great hospitality, extended to me and to my delegation, in this beautiful country.

Our presence here bears witness to the importance that Malta is giving, to create closer and more sustainable collaborations with Portugal, and to nurture the friendship that has existing between our two peoples, for centuries.

We are both united by the shared ideals of our European Union, built on the respect for human rights; the upholding of the rule of law; and the close cooperation among all of our respective countries.

The Maltese Islands are a bridge that connects cultures and continents, between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

I truly believe that this position of geo-strategic importance can be positively explored, for many socio-economic opportunities of interest to the people of Portugal.

On the other hand, Portugal also gives privileged access to the Iberian Peninsula and the Portuguese speaking world, of equal interest to the people of Malta.

Let us therefore intensify our efforts to collaborate, and to develop fruitful partnerships between our countries and our business communities.

In a world that is so competitive, and that has become so globalised, we need to think outside the box.

We need to be innovative and creative, and be courageous, to explore all potential collaborations, from which our businesses can grow and prosper together.

The presence of Malta's Minister for the Economy, Investment and Small Business, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion, and the Parliamentary Secretary for EU Funds and Social Dialogue, as part of this strong delegation, is evidence of the political will of my government, to explore further opportunities for sustainable collaboration and potential partnerships, in many sectors.

By working in synergy, not only will the business and social sectors of Malta and Portugal flourish, but our markets will also extend and expand, in the best interests of our peoples.

There is much potential, for our mutual economic cooperation.

I am pleased to note that tourism between our countries is increasing, and both of our countries offer a rich and diverse tourist package, attracting all types of visitors.

This is being further enhanced, during this summer season, where connectivity between Malta and Portugal will be increased. Such an increase will also benefit our business communities, due to greater ease of access to our countries.

I believe that tourism is an opportunity for economic growth, but it also, most importantly, provides person-to-person connections, which will result in a deepening of the cultural and social links between our peoples.

Definitely, tourism is not simply an economic operation, but also a means of bringing our two peoples together, to develop sustainable friendships.

For this reason, my State Visit is aimed at tangibly developing our already excellent 50 year old diplomatic and political relations into practical and sustainable results for our businesses, but also to develop stronger relations among our respective societies.

Furthermore, the presence in Portugal of a strong and diverse trade delegation from the Maltese Islands shows just how determined Maltese authorities and businesses are, to pursue closer collaborations and engage on all levels.

These are exciting times for both Malta and Portugal.

In Malta, we are at a stage whereby, due to our impressive economic growth, our businesses are seeking new opportunities and avenues for expansion, beyond the Maltese shores.

This is the potential that we bring with us, today, to Portugal.

We believe that it is essential that our collaborations take place across all levels. Not only do we urge collaboration with larger enterprises, and augur that they will be fruitful, but we must also promote connections and collaboration between our small and medium sized businesses.

These links will make a valuable contribution to the multi-level and mutual strengthening of our nations, while also mutually strengthening our respective positions within the European Union.

The Maltese Islands have much to offer in a variety of areas, including state-of-the-art institutions for financial services, industry, logistics, ICT, hospitality and tourism, blockchain technology, and the teaching of English as a foreign language, amongst others.

Furthermore, I believe that, for both of our countries, not only to survive but also to thrive, we must make effective investments in academic, scientific, and technical research, innovation, and start-ups.

Therefore, I would like to urge the Portuguese and Maltese Chambers of Commerce and Industry to continue exploring all our mutual potential.

I would like to remind you that governments are only enablers; it is your role, as entrepreneurs, to take our collaborations to the next level.

In conclusion, I believe that there is no limit to what we can do and achieve together.

The presence of our respective business communities here, today, is evidence of the strong commitment and enthusiasm, felt by our business sectors, to collaborate and to develop new partnerships.

Let me encourage you all to keep up the excellent momentum, which we have achieved so far, and take it to the next level.

I am confident that my presence in Portugal, together with my delegation, will not only help to further consolidate political and commercial ties between our two countries, but it will also strengthen relations between our business communities and our peoples.

I look forward to listening to the endeavours of our business communities, during the business to business meetings, for the lasting benefit of our nations, and our European Union.

Thank you for your attention.