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Meeting of the Directors General of Higher Education: Pursuing Digital Technology in Higher Education

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Today, the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union is hosting a two-day meeting of the Directors General of Higher Education. The meeting will see the group focusing on the use and promotion of digital technologies at the higher education level especially in the context of a drive to modernise higher education and of the use of digital technologies which can act as a stimulant for innovation, personalisation and wider access to higher education.

Hon. Evarist Bartolo, Minister for Education and Employment, opened the event, which was attended by over 60 delegates from European Member States and representatives from the European Students Union and European University Association.

Minister Bartolo emphasised the importance of coming together to seek solutions that address the technical, administrative, pedagogical and academic challenges in order to provide online higher education or in promoting the use of further digital tools in higher education. He insisted that all challenges could be overcome with the right policy approach. He was adamant to point out that whatever solution Member States seek to adopt, quality in the delivery of higher education should not be compromised. Minister Bartolo, also highlighted the fact that education goes beyond the economic aspect of employment, it is a crucial agent in combating social exclusion and facilitating social mobility. Hence the importance of online learning as a means of rendering education – higher education, more accessible.

During the meeting, the delegates were able to explore psychological and pedagogical barriers to online learning; quality assurance considerations; students' perspective on the use of digital educational tools. A number of examples from other European Member States were showcased during the meeting.

With regards to with the Council Conclusion agreed to during the European Education Council on 17th February 2017, focusing on the Inclusion in Diversity to achieve a high quality education for all, the delegates were able to explore how online provision of higher education keeps the students at the centre of all teaching and learning. The European Forum of the Directors General for Higher Education was also complemented by a UNESCO representative who brought to the

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forefront the emergency in Syria and the dire need for online higher education as a means of sustaining a resilient education system.

During the second day of the meeting, the delegates will be focusing on three European Commission consultation processes about the key competences for lifelong learning, proposed Council recommendations on promoting social inclusion and common EU values through formal and non-formal learning and the future of the Erasmus+.

