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**Opening Address by the Minister of Education Dr Louis Galea  
during the Socrates/Comenius 3 TEPEE (Towards a European  
Portfolio for Environmental Education) Network Meeting**

Galaxy Hotel, Sliema

Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2003

Ladies and Gentleman,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to deliver this opening address for the Socrates and Comenius 3 TEPEE Network Meeting.

Environmental topics have featured regularly within the Maltese school curriculum since the mid 1800s and this curricular concern has evolved throughout the years to reflect the various changes and needs of our society. Dealing with environmental issues has become one of the major concerns of education in all its sectors: the formal, the informal and the non-formal.

The Maltese educational system is currently undergoing a major reform. After years of painstaking consultations with the various stakeholders, the educational community published the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) entitled *Creating the Future Together*. True to its namesake, the NMC is proving to be a challenge to the educational community in that, rather than focusing solely on measures to cover as many fields of learning as possible, it addresses key educational issues that have plagued the Maltese educational system for many years. Keeping the well being of the learner at the centre of its concerns, the NMC is creating opportunities to introduce curriculum innovation within a holistic framework of guidelines coupled with the support infrastructure required.

The new NMC advocates a learner centred education by promoting thematic teaching/interdisciplinarity, ensuring relevance of knowledge to the learner's experiences, encouraging active learner participation, helping the development of critical thinking and participatory skills, presenting an assessment policy promoting a learner oriented pedagogy, and catering for a life-long education. Backing up these

principles, the NMC also promotes decentralisation by encouraging interaction with the community and NGO participation in curriculum development, assigning more autonomy for schools and promoting action research and a global perspective. Although the NMC does not specifically mention environmental education, nevertheless should the guidelines proposed take root, its infusion within the educational system would be greatly facilitated. This is reflected in the variety of environmental education initiatives that are already being organised in our schools. Furthermore the number of students sitting for the SEC examination in Environmental Studies

as a subject is also increasing year after year. In fact this year almost 3000 students sat for the SEC examination in this subject – a big leap from the mere 90 students who sat for the same examination eight years ago.

The philosophy promoted by the TEPEE (Towards a European Portfolio for Environmental Education) network is very much in line with our vision of school development and it is with pleasure that I accepted your invitation to open this first transnational seminar of the network and a Comenius 1 contact seminar that is being hosted in Malta. The main thrust of the network is to initiate innovation in the educational system by proposing a method of evaluation that celebrates the learner's growth in environmental education. This is particularly relevant to our local efforts in developing an evaluative process that while being more sensitive to individual needs and qualities helps the learner develop holistically. The use of portfolios as evaluative tools has already been extensively discussed locally in NMC fora and it is with great interest that we await the products of this network.

The dissemination of a European dimension is another feature that the TEPEE network is promoting through its activities. This feature is very close to our heart as a ministry and for these last years we have been actively encouraging initiatives that bring together people with different backgrounds from different European countries. This, in part, explains the high participation rate of schools in EU funded projects ... particularly those related to the environment. Therefore, while wishing you a fruitful meeting, I have the great pleasure to declare this event officially open.