The internationalization of the European Higher Education Area

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Introduction

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me thank you for your kind invitation to speak in this conference Firstly, I would like to congratulate the
organisers for holding this event about issues that are crucial for Europe's future.

In fact, providing an efficient response to the challenges of an increased need for knowledge, education, research and innovation is the one major determinant of Europe's future standing in the world.

Therefore, I am particularly glad to participate in this event where knowledge is considered, not only a core resource for social and economic development but, and above all, it is considered as a right for citizenship.

As a follow-up of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Commission launched in March the EU 2020 Strategy, a new European strategy for jobs and growth, which focus on the key areas such as knowledge, Research and Education.

To measure progress, the Commission proposes the following headline targets for Research and Education:

- 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D.
- The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a degree or diploma.

The European Commission also put forward the objective of investing 2% of GDP in higher education (currently 1.3%) by 2014 which implies higher investment in university-based research.

While Europe is certainly a highly educated society, only 21% of the EU working-age population has achieved tertiary education, significantly lower than in the US (38%), Canada (43%) or Japan (36%), as well as South Korea (26%).

On higher education, EU countries spend on average just 1.1% of GDP, far below Canada (2.5%), the US (2.7%) and South Korea (2.7%). This is almost entirely due to much lower private investment levels from industry and households in Europe. If Europe were to match the US figure, it would need to spend an additional EUR 150 billion each year on higher education.

EU also suffers an R&D funding gap. While the US devotes nearly 2.7% of GDP to R&D, Europe spends just 1.8%.

The role of universities in the knowledge society

During the last years the pivotal role of universities in the building of the knowledge society has been increasingly recognized at the highest political level. Universities are now a key topic in the agenda of the heads of state and government.

The Modernization agenda for Universities

In this direction, the Commission has put forward a modernization agenda for universities to set the broad principles that could drive this process of reform. Let me briefly outline these.

First of all, we need to break down the barriers around universities in Europe. Geographical and inter-sectoral mobility needs to increase substantially. All forms of mobility should be explicitly valued as a factor enriching studies at all levels (including research training at doctoral level), but also improving the career progression of university researchers and staff.

Second, we need to ensure real autonomy and accountability for universities. Universities will not become innovative and responsive to change unless they are given real autonomy and accountability. This requires new internal governance systems based on strategic priorities and on professional management of human resources, investment and administrative procedures. It also requires universities to overcome their fragmentation into faculties, departments, laboratories and administrative units and to target their efforts collectively on institutional priorities for research, teaching and services.

Third, we need to provide incentives for structured partnerships with the business community. While the public mission and overall social and cultural remit of European universities must be preserved, they should increasingly become significant players in the society, able to respond better and faster to the demands of the market and to develop partnerships which harness scientific and technological knowledge.

Fourthly, we need to enhance interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity to reconfigure teaching and research agendas to seize the opportunities offered by new developments in existing fields and by new emerging lines of scientific inquiry. This requires focusing less on scientific disciplines and more on key challenges (e.g. energy, climate change, nanotechnology, ageing) and fostering interaction between students, researchers and research teams through greater mobility between disciplines, sectors and research settings.

Fifthly, excellence should be rewarded at the highest level. Increased competition, combined with more mobility and further concentration of resources, should enable universities and their partners in industry to offer a more open and challenging working environment to the most talented students and researchers, thereby making them more attractive to Europeans and non-Europeans alike. Universities need to be in a position to attract the best academics and researchers, to recruit them by flexible, open and transparent procedures, to guarantee principal investigators/team-leaders full research independence and to provide staff with attractive career prospects.

Finally, we need to make the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area more visible and attractive in the world. The development of extensive cooperation, mobility and networks between European universities over the past decades has created the right conditions for broader internationalisation. Most universities now have experience with multilateral consortia and many are involved in joint courses or double degree arrangements. Continuing globalisation means that the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area must be fully open to the world and become worldwide competitive players.

In this vision, research programmes and priorities are well-coordinated through the joint programming, implementation and evaluation of public research investments at European level on grand challenges that go beyond the capacities of individual countries.

In order to achieve this vision, some major policy trends are taking shape. At different levels, being the Commission, the Member States or the same stake holders, we can observe some new developments which represent an interesting evolution from our traditional approach to research and higher education policy. I will briefly describe EIT as a reference.

The EIT as a reference

I am talking about the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (the EIT) that wants to be the European flagship of this effort to renovate our research, education and innovation system. A pan European partnerships of research organizations, universities and businesses, the so called Knowledge and Innovation Communities, will carry a joint programme of

activities to address a European or global challenge. An example of these will be a Community working on climate change and energy; another will be working on the next generation of Information and Communication Technologies. We hope that the next call will be in the area of Health.

At another level, Education and Training 2020 is a new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.

For instance, ERASMUS is the EU's flagship education and training programme enabling 200 000 students to study and work abroad each year. In addition, it funds co-operation between higher education institutions across Europe. The programme not only supports students, but also professors and business staff who want to teach abroad, as well as helping university staff to receive training.

Numerous programmes, initiatives and support measures are carried out at EU level in support of knowledge.

The Framework Programme bundles all research-related EU initiatives together under a common roof playing a crucial role in reaching the goals of growth, competitiveness and employment; along with a new Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP), Education and Training programmes, and Structural and Cohesion Funds for regional convergence and competitiveness. It is also a key pillar for the European Research Area (ERA).

We might expected the improvement and creation of dedicated structures and schemes to support the pooling of resources Europe wide, and a governance of the European research landscape increasingly organized around bottom-up partnerships of member states and knowledge players.

Another interesting trend in the governance of research is the increasing delegation to stakeholders of the definition of research priorities and their implementation.

Take the ERC for example. 7 billion Euros of community funds are delegated to an autonomous scientific council which sets the priorities and decides on the allocation of funds to promote investigator driven research.

Many of the goals we set to create an effective European Research Area require reforming the way in which knowledge institutions work. Take mobility for example. Through Marie Curie Grants The European Community has been awarding research fellowships to European researchers since the beginning of the 1980s. These have enabled researchers to carry out research in other Member States of the European Union and, more recently, in third countries associated with the specific RTD programmes.

Another major trend is the move from traditional collaboration networks to either the funding of teams to foster excellence, or to the funding of large integrated partnerships which are more focused on innovation. The bulk of EU research funding in FP7 will go to collaborative research, with the objective of establishing excellent research projects and networks able to attract researchers and investments from Europe and the entire world. This is to be achieved through a range of funding schemes: Collaborative projects, Networks of Excellence, Co-ordination/support actions, etc.

The Framework Programme is, therefore, one of the most important tools to contribute to knowledge in Europe. Regarding Health research under FP7, its main objective is to improve the health of European citizens and boost the competitiveness of health-related industries and businesses, as well as address global health issues. The Health theme is a major theme of the Cooperation programme and the EU has earmarked a total of € 6.1 billion for funding this theme over the duration of FP7. The specific programme on 'Cooperation' supports all types of research activities carried out by different research bodies in trans-national cooperation and aims to gain or consolidate leadership in key scientific and technology areas. FP7 allocates

EUR 32.4 billion to the Cooperation programme. The budget will be devoted to supporting collaborative projects across the European Union and beyond.

Key features for 2011 work programme include:

- 2-stage submission/evaluation extended to majority of topics, including clinical trials and SME topics
- International cooperation continues to be a priority for the Commission and an opportunity for applicants.

Priorities for 2011 work programme:

- Main priority areas:
  the brain (neurodegenerative + lifestyle-related aspects), diabetes/obesity & lifestyle-induced conditions, antimicrobial drug resistance, emerging epidemics, heath inequalities, …
- High impact research initiatives introduced:
  - Epigenomics
  - Better immunisation

2011 calls for proposals:

- Indicative budget: €650m
- Publication date: 30 July 2010 (tbc)
- Closing dates for submission (two main calls):
  - FP7-HEALTH-2011-single-stage, deadline: 10 Nov. 2010 (tbc)
  - FP7-HEALTH-2011-two-stage, deadline: 13 Oct. 2010 (tbc)

Funding schemes for these calls

Funding schemes	**upper limits**
Large-scale integrating project (CP-IP)	€12m or €30m
Small- or medium-scale focussed research project (CP-FP)	€3m or €6m
Coordination action (CA)	€2m
Support action (SA)	€0.5m

Under the Information Society portfolio of the European Commission, there is a programme on ICT for better Healthcare in Europe.

At EU level, the introduction of eHealth services is facilitating access to healthcare, whatever the geographical location, thanks to innovative telemedicine and personal health systems. eHealth is also breaking down barriers, enabling health service providers (public authorities, hospitals) from different Member States to work more closely together. If a particular treatment can be provided to a patient more effectively in another country, eHealth systems make it simpler to organise and carry out treatment abroad. Suppliers of eHealth tools – such as databases for patient records, mobile monitors which transmit data automatically, or handling systems for patient call centres – also benefit from the development of a European market in the sector, which has enabled them to build a strong base from which they can tackle the global market.

However, the research, academic and industry communities are calling for a harmonization of the rules and procedures of EU research funding and a general simplification of the financial accountability requirements.

As a member of the ITRE-Industry, Research and Energy Committee, I was recently appointed raporteur of the report on "Simplifying the implementation of the Research Framework Programmes" and I have been meeting different stakeholders.

Our work here has genuine relevance and urgency as a result. Our report is particularly timely, given that we are now just about to begin the interim evaluation of the FP7 and to start on the preparation for the FP8. Hopefully, our report will provide a firm foundation upon which we can subsequently build.

Conclusions

European research programs should be governed by a spirit of confidence and trust in scientific and business community and their inventive and innovative capacities. A better balance between trust and control and between risk taking and risk avoidance is required, while ensuring sound financial management. We need a new evaluation culture which requires a trust-based partnership among all the partners in order to strengthen Europe in making it an attractive working place. I look forward the contribution of all.