

Mr Vasilakos,

Distinguished colleagues and guests

Good afternoon

### *Introduction*

Let me begin by welcoming you to this panel.

The objective of our discussion is to address the societal challenges specific to Southern Europe with particular regard to the transfer of research to products and services of direct benefit to European citizens. Effectively transferring research to the market is something that Europe, in general, does not do *as well as* it should. This is unfortunate given that – as the Nobel Prize winner Robert Solow has demonstrated [in his *Contribution to the Theory of Economic Growth*] – 80 percent of economic growth in the industrialised countries results from the development of new technologies.

### *Challenges*

In this respect, countries in the south of Europe have traditionally had a strong research culture. However, despite possessing some of the best research centres in the world, southern Europe often still has considerable difficulty in developing their research base and converting their results into concrete products and services.

Indeed, these countries frequently encounter similar types of problems. One of the most frequent complaints is that of excessive bureaucracy. In this respect, I am optimistic that the new H2020 programme – for which I was the rapporteur for the Simplification Report – will allow for simpler access to funding and will be characterised by less red tape in general.

Beyond this, whilst Germany, Britain and France often appear as top of the class in terms of research results – certainly, in terms of competition for ERC Grants – the countries to the south of Europe, often tend to invest less than they should in research and development. For these countries, on average, only around 1% of GDP is invested in R&D.

This necessarily translates into weaknesses in terms of

capable or adequately equipped laboratories  
sustained excellence in research  
and the ability to generate innovative products.

This is, of course, to be set in the context of global changes. Asia, in particular, shows signs of very rapid progress in terms of industrial capacity but also educational achievement. India, for instance, has recently instructed its universities to limit its choice of international partners to the top 500 universities in the Shanghai ranking. The goal is to ensure that educational achievement is orientated towards excellence.

### *Actions*

As for how the countries of southern Europe might make a specific contribution, there are four areas that spring to mind:

Firstly, cultural heritage: southern Europe often has a superb cultural heritage and this is, undoubtedly, an area in which they are able to build up expertise and communicate this expertise to other European countries.

Secondly there is the Marine and maritime field: the region of Southern Europe – because of its proximity to the Mediterranean Sea – enjoys specific geographical and climatic conditions that represent an opportunity for the Research and Innovation landscape

in Europe. Here, “unlocking blue growth” is a priority for Horizon 2020

Thirdly there is food and agriculture: the Mediterranean climate generates a specific type of agriculture and this is also an area in which southern countries are able to make a unique contribution.

Finally, it is also possible that the southern countries might be able to make use of their *endogenous resources with regard to renewable energies* and here I am thinking less of the wind and the rain – that we are familiar with in Brussels – and more of solar power, for instance.

*End*

As we enter the twenty-first century, the Lisbon Strategy explicitly set out an ambitious plan for Europe. This was that Europe should become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economic area in the world. I am optimistic that even in a rapidly changing world, this goal is still attainable. If we are not to fall behind, however, it is imperative that we are able to offer researchers a stimulating and attractive environment – *in their own homelands* – at the same time as we are able to attract talent from across the world. Indeed, it is necessary that we foster excellent, innovative science across Europe, in general and southern Europe in particular. Not least of the benefits will be the stimulus to economic growth that excellence coupled to innovation will represent.

Against this background, I should like to finish by saying how much I am looking forward to the discussion.

At this point, let me hand over to Ms Joana Lamego, International Funding Officer at IMM, Faculty of Medicine of the University of Lisbon

Thank you