

Good afternoon everyone,

Let me first of all thank the Max Planck Institute – and Peter Gruss, in particular – for their kind invitation to take part in this panel discussion.

It is with great interest that I have listened to my fellow panelists. As for the particular contribution that I should like to make today, this is linked to my own role in the European Parliament where I am the permanent rapporteur of the EPP political group for research in the Budget Committee and the ITRE rapporteur for the Specific Programme Implementing Horizon 2020. In this capacity, I have been directly involved in the negotiations leading up to the final ratification of the Horizon 2020 framework programme. More particularly, during the course of my parliamentary activity, I have actively struggled to achieve the effective doubling of the Budget of the next European Programme for Research and Innovation as compared with the programme that will finish at the end of this year.

Questions related to research and innovation at a European level are not simply a matter of funding. There are other issues such as simplifying the whole process of access to funding, promoting excellence, ensuring an effective transition from research to the generation of marketable products, fostering the greater involvement of industry in research and innovation and ensuring an effective synergy between different sources of funding. It, nevertheless, remains the case that funding levels are crucial in determining what it is that we can actually achieve.

In this respect, investment in research and innovation is essential if we are to set Europe on the track to sustained growth and if we are to achieve such necessary goals as increased competitiveness on the international stage or reducing unemployment. This might be set in the wider context of the Europe 2020 strategy as this involves the fundamental objectives of building a new, knowledge based economic model, a low carbon economy and high levels of employment.

Beyond this, investment in research and innovation is crucial if we

are to meet the many and diverse challenges with which we are currently confronted. Scientific advances are crucial to the improvement of our quality of life as this ranges from enabling effective health care – including for an ageing population – to questions of the security of the energy supply or ensuring air and water quality, to name but these.

Indeed, dealing with the complexity of most of the scientific challenges we currently face, requires critical mass and access to expensive equipment, something that is better performed at European level. In this respect, the added value of European scientific programmes has been widely recognised due to both the critical mass and economy of scale that these programmes achieve.

At the same time, the widened scope of European funding – as opposed to national or local funding – tends, by definition, to promote excellence. However, it is also necessary, I feel, that we are able to promote the first seeds and the early growth of excellence and, here, in the Parliament has made a real effort to foster the participation of small units of embryonic excellence,

such as small research groups and highly innovative start ups. This will be achieved through the “stairway to excellence” and represents one, important way in which sustainable and competitive research structures could be established.

As I have mentioned, the degree to which Europe is able to contribute to these objective depends, to some considerable extent on there being a properly weighted budget for research and innovation at a European level. As for the level of funding that has actually been achieved, this now stands at 70 billion euros following protracted negotiations between the Parliament, the Council and the European Parliament.

The Parliament, for its part, initially held out for a figure of 100 billion euros. It is my own conviction that the ambitions of Horizon 2020 – as this set out to cover the whole cycle of innovation and as this would include such aspects as industrial demonstration projects or clinical trials – required the larger budget of 100 billion euros. However, times are hard and we shall have to make do with what we have.

A solution to remedying the budget shortfall is to deploy a multi-fund approach in which different funds are brought together in order to fund a common objective. Here I am thinking, in particular, of the ways in which productive synergies with the structural and cohesion funds can be created. However, another aspect that we have devoted considerable energy to in the Parliament is the question of aligning the regional funds with research and innovation objectives. Indeed, we have managed to include the creation of possible synergies between the regional funds and Horizon 2020 in both the regulations for Horizon 2020 and the regulations for the regional funds.

To conclude briefly, it is my conviction that under present circumstances it is essential that we make the best use of the resources that are available to us and that we seek to maximise the positive benefits of what Europe is able to achieve by effectively combining resources in such a way that research and innovation receives as much properly directed investment as possible.

In research, as in other domains in life, you only get out what you put in!