

### 5.3 SPEECH - SENATE

Ladies and Gentleman

It is a great honour that I should have the chance to meet with you all today.

As politicians I imagine you would all share with me the value attached to 'getting out of the office', leaving behind the officials and the internal process, and making the time to speak with the true stakeholders.

Since I took up the post as Commissioner I have tried never to lose sight of the fact that there is a whole world of opinion, and in fact the real power, outside of Brussels – and we lose contact with this at our peril.

I would like not only to speak a little on what we are doing in the European Commission to support innovation and research in Europe, but also I hope, hear what you have to say both on these plans, as well as, and indeed more importantly, what the priorities are in Italy.

In looking at the context for today I can't help but think of the huge historical significance of research in Italy, of its determining role since the Renaissance and the great

Italian figures who have contributed so much to the world of science.

The list is endless, but to cite just a few:

- Galileo Galilei, considered by many to be the most influential scientist of all time;
- Alessandro Volta, a physician, chemist, and physicist;
- Or Guglielmo Marconi whose contribution led to the electronic media of today. In 1907 his work culminated in the opening of the first transatlantic commercial service between Glace Bay in Nova Scotia, Canada, and Clifden in Ireland (in my own county). Where would politicians be without him?
- And more recently, Enrico Fermi, one of the fathers of nuclear physics and Nobel laureate; Carlo Rubbia, whose work at CERN led to the Nobel Prize for Physics; or Rita Levi-Montalcini, a trailblazer for women scientists, winner of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, and also a member of this Senate.

I should not leave this point without mentioning Niccolò Machiavelli, perhaps a strange choice although someone of whom any politician should be aware if they want to

stick around long enough, since some have attributed his painstaking analysis as a foundation in the evolution of the scientific method, albeit in this case for rather a different purpose.

We find ourselves today at a turning point. We have seen over recent years the turbulent and damaging effects of the economic crisis but we still have choices and we most certainly still have decisions to make.

You will forgive me if I speak very bluntly when I say that investing now in research and innovation is not an option. It is our future. It is the route through which we will see ourselves out of these difficult times and fashion the equipment – the knowledge, the skills, the infrastructure, which will be so vital in the years ahead.

When the European Commission put forward its proposals for Horizon 2020 in November last year, I think we all felt the significance of this event. With these proposals we aim to set the path for EU research and innovation through to 2020, but also to provide an instrument which will be the driving force of the EU economy, competitiveness and the quality of the lives we lead.

Keeping all of this in mind we chose to make a complete break from the past, while keeping the very best elements of what has gone before.

On the basis of an enormous public consultation, we listened to what you all had to say, we looked at the results of evaluations of previous Framework Programmes for Research, and we followed up on the many important contributions from every conceivable source – including the Member States, the European Council, the European Parliament and all manner of research performing organisations, universities and businesses.

I genuinely believe that what we were able to come up with is something that does the near impossible trick of pleasing most of the people most of the time, and many of the people all of the time. The very positive feedback we have so far, including from the Council and the Parliament goes some way to proving this point.

You will recall the structure of the proposal, split into the three priorities – or Pillars - of Excellent Science, Industrial Leadership and Societal Challenges.

This structure in my view is at the heart of the achievement, since it demonstrates in a clear way the outcomes we want from our research and innovation activities.

Not only will this help us manage the Horizon 2020 programme, in the way that objectives are set and performance is measured, it also helps us to communicate what the research and innovation activities are all about.

To take the societal challenges as a case in point, we now have priorities which connect with, and reflect, the very things that are important to people across Europe...the ageing of the population; climate change, energy and food security; transport....

Building this connection to real needs is vital as we seek to boost the innovation performance, indeed the impact, of the programme.

In other areas too, Horizon 2020 is breaking new ground, namely:

- through a coordinated set of actions, including a major increase in funding to the very successful

European Research Council, which will help to build the knowledge base for future innovation and the system for generating such knowledge;

- through specific attention to the underpinning Key Technologies which are at the heart of innovation – such as ICT, bio and nano ;
- with innovative support to SMEs, including an integrated approach, simplification through a single contact point for all information, and a dedicated new scheme inspired by the United States' Small Business Innovation Research Programme;
- through much improved access to risk finance by way of a debt and equity platform;
- and through a huge effort to cut red tape and simplify rules and procedures throughout the programme.

We now have to turn all of this into reality. I hope you will not mind if I say it is a task for all of us.

By saying this I am not attempting to avoid responsibility or minimise the role of the European Commission in the negotiations in the Council and the Parliament.

There is a lot at stake and we must be steadfast in support of the proposals, especially as the difficult negotiations on EU funding unfold, but most importantly because Horizon 2020 is also an economic measure, helping Europe invest now in the sources of future growth and jobs.

Horizon 2020 is a European-level programme, but of course it will help safeguard and create research and innovation jobs in Member States, regions and cities. The success of Horizon 2020 will in part depend on its achievement in linking with activities across the European Research Area. As I said at the start, I look forward to hearing more, as I already have today, about your national plans for research and innovation.

Thank you