

POVERTY ALLEVIATION

A ROLE FOR TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE?

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Speech

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Thank you, President Prodi. Good morning to everybody. Dear President, dear Minister Gentiloni and dear participants, I'm very honoured to be here today at this important conference on the role of technology and infrastructure in alleviating poverty reduction. You can imagine that as a Director for International Cooperation in Research and Innovation at the European Commission, this is a team which is very dear to my heart and also is very present in my daily work. What I would like to do here is to give a broader perspective of what the European Commission has been doing, is doing and will do with the framework. I do believe, as it was said yesterday evening and this morning, that research and innovation are playing (and should also play) an important role in poverty alleviation. And I think that the discussion today is very timely, also if we consider and you have been following and certainly reading on the papers the fact that the European Commission will adopt on Wednesday a broader communication with some policy measures on immigration. A new package in immigration which, in fact, will have also a specific reference to the role of

research and innovation in order to tackle the roots which lead to migration. And that is very important, it's something I would like to say here, because it's the result of my work, the work of my colleagues, to bring it to the highest political attention in the Commission and of course it is something that we need really to take into account and it's a bit also the theme of the Conference today that if you want to tackle successfully issues like immigration, we don't just have to speak about asylum quotas, which are of course very important, but also the roots which lead to immigration.

It is very important to say, in fact, that research and innovation and especially the work that is being done in the European Commission it certainly has the aim, according to the Treaty, to enhance the European Union's competitiveness and growth. But, of course, research and innovation is (and should be also) a tool of our external policy, of the policy that we want to carry out with Third countries.

We have been working since many years in order to design instruments and activities that would put research and innovation as an instrument to tackle poverty alleviation and I would like here to praise the work done under the Prodi's commission by my former Commissioner Mr. Philippe Busquin who launched in that period what is called the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership. I guess President Prodi will remember that major initiative that has been just renewed, that puts together researchers and clinical practices from the European Union and the developing countries, to develop together and experiment together clinical trials which would be then aimed at being used also in those countries to combat the major instances.

As it is mentioned in the concept note, which was prepared and distributed for this Conference, building institutional and governance reform should not be the only

focus of our activities with those countries which are more affected by poverty, but we should also deal with the human factor. The human factor, which implies, as it is mentioned in the document, the need to build trust and communication among diverse and divided individuals, who will then work together. And this is something very important for us and links exactly to what we are doing in the Commission and to a concept which is very dear to Mr. Carlos Moedas, who is the new Commissioner for Research and Innovation. Who, by the way, was invited here and couldn't come and asked me to give you his best regards and wishes for this discussion. So one of the key policy initiatives that we want to carry out, sponsoring these five years of the Juncker's Commission is to work in order to develop the concept of science diplomacy. Science diplomacy as a supporting activity that would put together scientists and people who would not normally work together, thus creating this communication and human contexts which are necessary and which are in fact referred to in the concept note for this Conference.

I had once the occasion to speak with Minister Gentiloni and told him about how much through science and innovation and with science diplomacy we can bring to the dialogue that we have with Third countries and regions. And how much it is important in our work to use international cooperation in the field of research and innovation, not only to advance, as I said, in growth and competitiveness, but also to create and stimulate the conditions for peace, security and sustainable developments.

In fact, this is one of the elements, science diplomacy and the role of research and innovation as a tool supporting the European Union's external policies, which is presented in what we call the "new strategy for international cooperation and research innovation", which is a policy document prepared by the European Commission and endorsed by the Council of Ministers, during the period of preparation of Horizon

2020. Horizon 2020, which is the new research framework programme to which I will come in a moment.

The strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation aims at saying that Europe wants to do much more in research and innovation with Third countries and regions, amongst others because of the role that research and innovation can have as an instrument of our external policy, in synergy with the other instruments of the external policy, and particularly the development funds, in order to create the conditions for poverty alleviation, amongst others, science diplomacy and a more equal and sustainable development and growth.

As I'm saying, this communication is one of the building blocks which was established during the phase of preparation of Horizon 2020. And I think that it's important here to speak about Horizon 2020 because of course one has to consider the political willingness, what we want to do, what is important to do. But one also has to consider the instruments that we have in order to reach such aims and ambitions. And there I must say that we have, with Horizon 2020, the biggest research programme in the world, multi-sectoral research programme in the world. The European Union has been carrying out research programmes since the last thirty years and now, in 2013, we really make a big step forward with the adoption of this programme, which is in fact the programme with a duration of seven years and with a budget with €80-billion. That is a major development because, as you know, we've been in a period of financial crisis and in the discussions which took place in the years 2012-2013, which led to the adoption of the multiannual financial frameworks for the European Union activity, with the only policy which has been an increase has been the policy for research and innovation and with the programme Horizon 2020 we have a 20% increase from previous programmes.

Now, why am I talking about this programme? Because in fact, and the strategy for international cooperation, because this programme is built upon this strategy and it is built upon the idea and the objective of increasing international cooperation and of using international cooperation also as a tool for the EU's external policy, which as a result the fact that the programme is completely open to participation of research organizations, being them public or private, from all over the world. And there I would like to say that we are coming out a very important work which links also to the priorities that Minister Gentiloni referred to earlier on, specifically with Africa, in the field of food scarcity and nutrition. We have set up a high-level group which is composed by representatives of the European Commission, of the African Commission. By the way, I forgot to say that on April 22nd, just some weeks ago, there was an important meeting between the European Commission and the African Commission, in which in fact research and innovation was singled out as a major element of the bi-regional cooperation. And, in fact, as a way of supporting development and thus tackling poverty alleviation.

Anyway, to come back to what we're doing within the framework of Horizon 2020, we have established this high-level policy dialogue between the European Commission, the African Commission, with the commissioners for research and innovation, our Member States and the African Member States. We have involved also the other financial institutions. And there we are designing some specific activities that should be carried out through Horizon 2020 in the field of food scarcity and nutrition. In what we call the work programmes for 2016-17, which are in fact the programmes that are being launched now in order to carry out the specific research activities within Horizon 2020, we are committing €25-million for specific activities with African countries in the field of food scarcity and nutrition.

And the Minister spoke about the Milan exhibition. We will present those activities in October in Milan and we are really contributing with that to this high-level policy discussion which will be carried out in the framework of the work of the Milan exhibition. And we will come out with some specific proposals on the top of these initiatives which are being launched now, to be endorsed in 2016 by our leaders in order to make this vision of strength and cooperation between the EU and the African countries in research and innovation even more real.

Without being too long, also I note that the title of this Conference is Research, Innovation and Infrastructures. Of course infrastructures, too, have a very important role to play in this context of the discussion of poverty alleviation. And we have also specific activities in the framework of the Horizon 2020 programme, to support infrastructures and to support international cooperation within infrastructures. For example, I just would like to mention that we have been working a lot together with Africa on the Square Kilometre Array, which is a major infrastructure.

And then it was very interesting to listen yesterday to Mr. Moretti from Finmeccanica speaking about the importance of earth observation because we do have a very important initiative and projects on the global earth observation. We do participate to these fora, which has a specific African segment, the AfriGEOSS Earth Observation. And within this fora, in fact, we also contribute with dedicated specific projects which, as Mr. Moretti said yesterday, are really important for climate change, for the management of resources, in particular water resources. Because, as you know, water scarcity is really one of the big challenges for those countries more affected by poverty.

I don't want to be too long now in listing all the past, ongoing and planned initiatives carried out in the European Union in this field. And, by the way, other colleagues

will intervene there on specific activities, in particular in the field of energy. But I just want to say that in speaking about the sustainable development goals, and Minister Gentiloni referred to the U.N. Conference in September which will have to adopt the post-2015 framework, there also I would like to say that the Commission, in its contribution which was adopted in March, in its contribution for the UN decisions on the post-2015, made a very, gave a very strong position to research and innovation as one of the building blocks for the new post-2015 development agenda. And that is reflected also concretely by the fact that 60% of the total budget of Horizon 2020, which again I would like to repeat is of about €80-billion, should be dedicated to sustainable development.

So just to say that this is very important for us, both from a political point-of-view. But we don't only have the political willingness at the EU level, we also have the tools.

Now I think that the discussion today is very important in this framework. I myself regret that I will not be able to assist to the whole day's discussion, but I was very pleased to give this political framework from the European Commission side. And I would really like to wish you a successful discussion and to hope that, by putting all our forces together, we can do even more in order to tackle poverty alleviation through research and innovation. Thank you.