

**Commissioner GEOGHEGAN-QUINN**

**Speech: Opening Reception of the COST Exhibition  
'Networks and Science' at the European Parliament**

**Brussels, 18 October 2011**

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here in the European Parliament for the opening of COST's exhibition on Networks and Science.

Networking is a marvellous way to improve Europe's scientific excellence.

In the first place this means bringing teams of researchers and scientists together to collaborate; but it also means creating opportunities to bring researchers, business, parliamentarians, and governments together to work together to improve our science systems and policy.

COST was a major improvement when it was launched in 1971 to promote cooperation among researchers across Europe. This was long before the European Research Area and Innovation Union acted as the reference frameworks for research and innovation policy in Europe, as they do today.

Within the COST framework, more than 200 networks are active, involving some 20 to 30,000 researchers.

I would like to thank COST's staff and its President, Doctor Rodriguez-Peña, as well as her predecessors Professor Fedi and Mr. Diehl, for their work to modernise this framework, which, now meets their customers' needs even more efficiently and effectively.

The benefits of these reforms were identified in the recent FP7 mid-term evaluation of COST and in line with the recommendation of this review, COST now enjoys an additional 30 million Euro of funding from FP7 to support the COST researcher community via the European Science Foundation. This brings the total EU financial support to EUR 240 million.

I would like to highlight two areas in which the flexible, bottom-up nature of COST has proven to add real value.

First, COST identifies, supports and gives visibility to "pockets of excellence" throughout Europe. COST can be instrumental in helping research communities in less advanced regions to develop their capacities, strengthen excellence and thus boost their participation in FP7 and in the future research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020. This is an important contribution, and was a crucial consideration for us when we allocated additional funds to COST under FP7.

Second, COST reaches out effectively to young researchers. I hope COST will continue to build on this, giving many more young researchers a taste of the benefits of collaborating at the European level.

Because now more than ever, we need the best brains working together in Europe on the breakthroughs needed to tackle major societal challenges such as climate change, food and energy security, and public health. A well functioning European Research Area – the ERA - will allow us to avoid fragmentation of efforts, and

achieve the critical mass necessary to tackle our biggest research challenges. And ERA will give us better value for money by reducing unnecessary duplication in the research and infrastructure financed under national systems.

That's not to say that national research or research systems aren't also terribly important. Of course not! A diversity of systems and approaches is very healthy and produces creative synergies. But through ERA, we need to connect up national research systems more effectively, to create the right balance between cooperation and competition so that we get the most out of them.

EU added value comes from cross border cooperation; from EU-wide competition to promote excellence; the mobility of researchers and leveraging public and private finance into EU projects.

Our ambitions for the European Research Area, and for Innovation Union, will be supported by Horizon 2020, the new programme for European research and innovation, to be launched in 2014.

Horizon 2020 will be more than a funding programme. With the Parliament's support, Horizon 2020 will underpin the European Union's goal to become a truly innovative knowledge society, boosting growth and jobs.

The European Commission is working intensively to finalise its proposals for Horizon 2020, which will be presented by the end of this year.

With Parliament's support, we will ensure that an efficient, effective and user-friendly Horizon 2020 starts on time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure that the exhibition we will view this evening will give us a informative picture of what COST stands for.

I am dedicated to improving how we communicate more widely the vital work achieved by investing in research and innovation at the European level. So, I warmly welcome initiatives like this that illustrate the results and impact of research cooperation across European

borders – in this case the benefits achieved through COST networking.

I am eager to see how these COST activities address key societal challenges - the issues of greatest concern to people - and how they enhance innovation and competitiveness in Europe.

This COST exhibition will, I hope, show again that European society is much better off with European research and innovation.

Thank you for your attention.