

Euro-Mediterranean conference launches new partnership in research and innovation

Some 350 top-level scientists and policy-makers from more than 30 countries around the European Union and Mediterranean region met in Barcelona, Spain, on April 2-3 to launch a new partnership in research and innovation. The aim of the conference, the first of its kind, was to map out a pathway to establishing a Common Research and Innovation Agenda, aimed at addressing the grand societal challenges impacting the region, notably in the field of energy, water, food, transport and health.

Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, who opened the conference, said: "Research and innovation are key elements of the European Union's cooperation with Mediterranean countries since we are all facing challenges such as climate change, water management and energy security. It makes perfect sense to tackle these issues jointly, and to bring our scientists together so they can find the answers we need."

The new partnership was proposed by the European Commission as part of the European Union's response to the political changes taking place in the Southern Mediterranean and in view of Horizon 2020, the EU's proposed policy for funding research and innovation after 2014. Horizon 2020 stresses the importance of maintaining international cooperation in research and innovation as a key aspect of the EU's global commitments.

Conference participants said that a renewed partnership in Research and Innovation should be based on the principles of co-ownership, mutual interest and shared benefit. They urged the agenda to cover the whole chain from research to innovation, mobilising universities, research centres, industry and extending to organisations that provide support services, such as financial institutions and investors. They stressed the need to reform, modernise and strengthen R&I systems and that investment in R&I should be recognised as a priority in national economic policy. The training and mobility of young and experienced researchers should also be encouraged further between European and Mediterranean countries.

To ensure a smooth follow-up to the recommendations of the conference, the European Commission announced that it would launch activities for a total budget of €40 million to support this new partnership and prepare the way for even more substantial cooperation in the future involving all EU Member States and Mediterranean countries. Amongst others, this will help complementing the numerous bilateral approaches by a "region to region" approach and as such take a more strategic perspective which will allow to build scale and scope.

The conference results will be presented in a consolidated paper before the next joint monitoring committee meeting on Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in research and innovation, due to take place this summer. The paper will also be brought to the attention of the EU Research Ministers and European stakeholders.

Barcelona, 3 April 2012.