Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today with you at the 20th anniversary conference of the EC-US Task Force on Biotechnology Research. On behalf of the European Commission, I would like to extend my congratulations on the excellent work and many outstanding achievements of the Task Force of which we will hear throughout the day.

Let me begin:

1. by briefly introducing myself – I joined DG Research a few months ago as the Deputy Director General for Scientific Advances.

And, 2. thanking the Spanish Presidency, represented today by Mr. Felipe Pétriz, and Dr. Teresa Garcia-Milà of the University of Pompeu Fabra for hosting this event and for its excellent preparation.

Global challenges

We live in a world which is increasingly integrated economically, and is affected by global challenges such as climate change, food security and environmental degradation. The recent financial and food crises have reminded us that the world is changing quickly and dramatically. The challenges of providing a growing population with appropriate food, water, shelter, and livelihoods, without further degradation of the environment are being taken up worldwide.

Importance of research and innovation and cross-border collaboration

Both President Obama and EU leaders have clearly stressed the importance of science and technology in tackling these global challenges.

At the European level, the European Commission recently published its new Europe 2020 Strategy. This is an ambitious, transformational agenda, designed to turn Europe into a competitive, sustainable and socially inclusive market economy. Research and innovation are at the very core of the Europe 2020 Strategy - they are the only way to deliver new sources of sustainable growth.
It is also clear that we can't work on our own. Global challenges can only be addressed through global efforts – building the coalition of the best research capacities across the world, via broad international and interdisciplinary efforts.

US-EU collaboration

- The United States and the European Union enjoy the world's most important bilateral relationship, sharing common values, challenges and prospects. We also share a global responsibility for providing leadership in addressing the world’s problems.

- Furthermore, the US and the EU are the world's largest producers of knowledge and the most important partners in science and technology. That is true whether we look at investment in research and development, interchange of scientists and researchers, volumes of cooperative activities or the number of co-authored publications and patents.

- The US and EU have a strong tradition of cooperation. Let me point out to few examples:

- At the European level, we support our research cooperation with the United States – as with other third countries - through the 7th Framework Programme. FP7 is far more open than any previous such programme to international collaboration, and within it, the US is the number one international participant, with involvement in some 300 current projects and researcher exchanges.

- Another example is the launch of new Innovation Dialogues, under the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC). The objective is to jointly identify steps that will improve the policy environment and so boost growth, productivity and entrepreneurial activities, drawing on the talents and ideas in both markets. Innovation is an area where Europe has a strong interest in sharing experiences with the US of how best to turn new knowledge into new economic growth and jobs and these innovation dialogues may include themes such as nanotechnology and the bio-economy, both falling into the remit of the EC-US Task Force.

Achievement of the Task Force

Last but not least, the EC-US Task Force on biotechnology research has proven to be a most fruitful model for transatlantic collaboration. As already highlighted by Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn, not only has the Task Force served as a forum for transatlantic cooperation but its activities has also provided the foundation basis for the launch of Global initiatives such
as the Global biodiversity Information Facility in 2001 and the International Neuroinformatics Coordinating Facility in 2007 (both established under the OECD Megascience Forum).

Prospects

I would like to finish my introduction by congratulating the Task Force members for their remarkable work and achievements to date, but I would also like to stress that the Task Force has an even more important role to play in future decades.

The world that once created the transatlantic partnership is fading fast in a globalised economy. The US and Europe must strengthen their relationship into a more effective and strategic partnership which addresses global challenges.

Our scientific cooperation agendas cannot move forward independently. They must support each other. We face similar problems and we should also find solutions together.

The progress in life sciences and their application in biotechnology are crucial in providing solutions to the most critical global challenges facing our societies today.

I believe the Task Force will be a cornerstone for addressing our common problems and building world-class alliances in research, promoting sustainable development and economic growth world-wide.

I wish the Task Force fruitful discussions during this Conference and successful work in the future.