**Partnership in Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA)**

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Ministers, Commissioners, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning.

First, I would like to thank the Greek Presidency and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs of the Hellenic Republic for their kind invitation to speak in front of such an esteemed gathering at the Informal Competitiveness Council.

Being the only speaker from a non-EU Member State, I bear the obligation of conveying the point of view of the south Mediterranean countries regarding the PRIMA initiative, with a view to complimenting the interventions of my colleagues from the member states.

As already mentioned by the co-chair of PRIMA, this initiative builds upon several other EU programmes, instruments and projects that fostered the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in research and innovation and paved the way to the conception of PRIMA. In this regard, allow me to critically reflect on the development of this partnership so that we could decide together on how to proceed with a shared vision towards a Euro-Mediterranean Area for Knowledge, Research and Innovation, which we jointly regard as our ultimate objective.

* In 1995, the Barcelona Process, with its Declaration initiated a complex programme for Euro-Mediterranean partnership aiming at establishing an area of peace stability and prosperity. It proposed a framework to support dialogue among cultures of the region, to disseminate a culture of human rights and democratic citizenship, to alleviate poverty and establish economic prosperity. It was realised from the outset that such an ambitious objective necessitates the sustainable development of scientific and technological cooperation and partnership among Euro-Med countries.
* In 2007, and after 12 years of the initiation of the Barcelona Process, which was meanwhile replaced by a newer instrument, the ENPI, the Ministers of Higher Education and Research convened the first and only Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher and Research and issued an ambitious paper, the Cairo Declaration, where they placed Research and Innovation as a priority sector in the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.
* In 2008, the Union for the Mediterranean was founded and the Heads of States, meeting in Paris, positioned higher education and research as one of the six priority areas of the union.
* In 2011, responding to the political turmoil in the south of the Mediterranean, the EU issued a joint communiqué, “a New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood” stressing the need for a new approach to strengthen the partnership between the EU and the ENP countries. Working towards the development of a “common knowledge and innovation space”.

**All through these years** from 1995 to 2011, the cooperation between the EU and the south Mediterranean countries was mostly governed by EU instruments and initiatives, which, **while involving the institutions on both shores of the Mediterranean in considerable cooperation, did not quite establish the desired true partnership** towards a common knowledge and innovation space**.**

Recognising the challenge of engaging the MPCs in a true partnership , the senior officials at the 15th Meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Monitoring Committee on Research and Innovation (MoCo or currently GSO) responding to the changing political landscape after the popular revolts of the south Med countries, revisited the principles of Euro-Med cooperation. In this regard, MOCO pronounced the principles of true partnership through **demand driven, impact driven cooperation based on the principles of co-ownership by means of co-funding initiatives of mutual interest and shared benefit**. I had the honour of co-chairing this meeting as the co-chair of the UfM at that time, together with my French colleagues.

These principles were further reiterated during the “Euro-Med Conference on Research and Innovation: an Agenda for a renewed Partnership” organised by DG-RTD in April 2012 in Barcelona. The conclusions of this conference called for an implementation of Article 185 for joint programming with the Mediterranean region. The MPCs regard as important milestones the conclusions of both the 15th MoCo meeting in Szeged, Hungary in June 2011 and the Barcelona conference in April 2012. The **PRIMA initiative was thus developed to respond to both events conclusions and address the challenge of fully engaging the MPCs in a true partnership**.

The MPCs insisted on the full integration in the whole process from the start, from the governance, priority setting and co-funding of the joint initiatives to the evaluation and accountability of the results and impact. We recognise that this can only be achieved through article 185 of the EU treaty. We thus welcome such an initiative that responds to the challenge of attaining the true Euro-Mediterranean partnership in Research and Innovation.

While acknowledging the fact that the process of our full integration in the initiative is by no means hurdle free, the MPCs emphasize their commitment to undertake all necessary measures to facilitate this process. We have been fully engaged in all meetings from the outset, we mobilized all necessary resources to discuss, negotiate and conclude the required agreements and we not only actively participated in the designated PRIMA working groups, but we also chaired two of those groups. As an example, the working group, which I have the privilege of leading, on the governance and DIS, has extensively researched other initiatives and rules and regulations during the last 10 months, consulted with all stakeholders, produced three working documents and is now reaching a final proposal on the DIS.

The Identified thematic fields of Food and Water, of which the case was well made by Prof. Lykousis, do not only represent areas with immense challenges to the well being and sustainability of the region, but also pose untapped opportunities for cooperation between the EU member states and the south Med countries that fulfil the basic principles of mutual interest and shared benefit. In addition, they represent sectors that are central to other societal challenges, namely Energy, Health and the Environment. In short, **they are the mothers of all challenges in the region**. *High quality affordable food is not just a challenge it is the essence of sustainable development of the south Mediterranean.*

The PRIMA initiative has also addressed through its remaining working groups the issues of mapping, funding and developed a road map and we hope that a convincing proposal could be finalized in the near future. We also count on the support of the EC and the other EU member states not involved in PRIMA, and which will have access to the joint initiatives.

Excellencies….

In its 2020 strategy and along the Innovation Union Flagship initiative, the EU aspires for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. This far-reaching ambition implies that the EU member states must achieve substantial advances in scientific and technological development along its societal challenges which the south Mediterranean countries not only share, but could also significantly contribute in addressing these challenges.

I am not making the case for the added value for Euro-Med cooperation and partnership because that is quite obvious, but I hope that I made the case for the Euro-Med partnership along the PRIMA initiative.

Thank you for your attention and best wishes in your deliberations…