

Workshop on “Information and Communication Technologies in the Horizon 2020 program. Opportunities and Challenges for Cyprus.”

Nicosia, Cyprus, December 2, 2013.

Welcome message by the Minister of Communications and Works

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I have accepted your invitation to address this very important workshop on “Information and Communication Technologies in the Horizon 2020 program – Opportunities and Challenges for Cyprus”. I take this opportunity to express my warmest congratulations to the University of Cyprus for organising this workshop and thank our distinguished guests from the European Commission, Mr Varghese and Mr. Malekos for participating as keynote speakers.

In times of economic crisis and rapid technological developments, we cannot afford to ignore one of our key strengths, **the potential of our human capital**, which will help us to achieve a sustainable economic development. I believe that in a country like Cyprus, where there is a plethora of young and talented scientists in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), an important resource for economic development lies unexploited.

The Horizon 2020 funding Scheme, of over €70 billion, for research and innovation can help us exploit this resource and generate new knowledge for the benefit of the society as a whole and for securing Europe’s global competitiveness. After all, our way of living is in many ways shaped by the results of research and innovation in ICT.

We are now in the digital age and we are heading rapidly towards a fully interconnected society. An era of convergence of what previously constituted different worlds and markets. The Internet provides a single platform for new creative opportunities and we must use it as a tool to increase the efficiency of our economy, enhance the quality of life of our citizens, promote democracy and culture and adopt green technologies. Services are converging and moving from the analog to the digital world and are commonly available - from any location, any device and at any time. It is projected that by 2020 digital content and applications will be distributed almost entirely online.

The EU firmly believes that this new programme for research and innovation is part of the drive to create the conditions for new growth and jobs in Europe by bringing together all existing EU research and innovation funding and channel it through every stage of the innovation process from basic research to market uptake, in line with the EU's commitments under the "Innovation Union".

As part of the implementation of the Digital Strategy of Cyprus, and taking into account the President's Governance Programme which aims to revive and restructure the economy and create new jobs, the Ministry of Communications and Works has prioritized the six strategic objectives of Digital Strategy of Cyprus. To ensure the successful and sustainable implementation of our digital strategy it is critical that we also align our research and innovation initiatives with the objectives set out in the digital strategy as these evolve and change over time.

Our digital strategy includes the Digital Entrepreneurship and Digital Modernization of the Public and Wider Public Sector by providing effective and efficient electronic public services accessible to all citizens, including electronic health. Digital entrepreneurship is very important since small and medium enterprises (SMEs) form the backbone of our economy and should be reinforced with specific funding schemes for the use of Information and Communications Technologies and the promotion of e-commerce which can significantly increase the turnover of businesses in Cyprus.

At the same time, the modernization of the public sector and the provision of electronic public services, will not only benefit each one of us as individuals but will also play a very important role in increasing the use of electronic means and broadband applications and services.

Broadband networks achieving high and ultra-high speeds are the basis for the development of our digital economy and cannot be offered without infrastructure services such as cloud computing, e-health, smart cities, smart meters and e-learning. The public and wider public sectors can benefit from cloud computing services while SMEs can utilize cloud computing services to increase their productivity and competitiveness.

The development and wide availability of electronic services will give the incentives to invest in networks of high and ultra-high broadband speeds. Our objective of increasing broadband penetration and connecting the whole of Cyprus with networks capable of high and ultra-high speeds is progressing. The first national target for universal broadband in Cyprus at a speed 2 Mbps (mega bits per second) has already been achieved and by 2017 we expect to achieve our second national target for universal broadband access at speeds of 30 Mbps (mega bits per second).

The Innovation Union Scoreboard for 2011 positions Cyprus among the “innovation followers”. In spite of a steady improvement in our innovation performance since 2006, a number of important research and innovation (R&I) indicators remain low or very low.

Looking forward we need to strive for a more focused approach to utilise the limited financial resources available, target smart specialisation, increase the involvement of SMEs in research and innovation activities and create more opportunities for research careers by exploiting the large pool of talented, highly educated, young people, thus bridging the gap between higher education and research. Ultimately, this can be achieved by spurring new thinking, exploring new possibilities, and unleashing the creative potential of our academic community.

Ahead of us we still have to change a lot. I would like to invite and challenge everyone to join our efforts so as to take advantage of the opportunities offered through the Horizon 2020 programme and embrace in ICT research and innovation activities using our collective knowledge and talent to give Cyprus and Europe the future it deserves.

I wish you all every success in this very important workshop.

Ministry of Communications and Works

2 December 2013