

HE Rupert Joy, Head of Delegation of the European Union to Morocco

HE Mr. Joy welcomed HE Dr. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh, the ministers and the distinguished guests, and he expressed his pleasure to be part of the e-AGE 2015 event. He added; the EU attaches great importance to such regional platforms which encourage and promote dialogue, partnership and which work to raise the awareness of key issues for the Mediterranean region.

Today and the next days we have the opportunity to focus on Intercontinental Connectivity of the Pan Arab Network, thereby discussing and exchanging research and education experience and innovations.

We can learn very valuable lessons from each other and they may be very pertinent for a number of countries, in particular given that almost all countries of the region are confronted with serious employment and social issues, aggravated by the 2008 global financial crisis as well as the economic impact of the Arab Spring.

Europe is not an exception. We face the same questions as our neighbours. We all face the same global challenges. We all want to provide wellbeing and high quality services for our citizens. So, we must work together to give ourselves the best possible chances to achieve exactly that. And one of the answers is that we must invest in openness and research!

The EU is committed to work closely with all partner countries in order to reap together the benefits of a stronger role of research and innovation. An enhanced focus on research and innovation is key for the creation of growth, employment, and also peace. It is a constant endeavour that is crucial for sustainable economic development and building more inclusive societies. Ladies and gentlemen, Research and innovation partnerships are bridges of cooperation and diplomacy, enhancing political stability, sustainable economic development and employment. Before we even consider the many benefits of diversity that science and research can deliver. Bridges such as this conference and the respective endeavour to link our research communities.

But also bridges like PRIMA for example: The Partnership in Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area. PRIMA will mobilise joint research on two of the most urgent challenges to the Euro-Mediterranean area: the efficiency and sustainability of food production and water provision. We all live from the same earth; we all drink from the same water cycles. We need our neighbors to be close partners and research helps us to unite.

And there are examples of openness further afield. Launched in 2004, SESAME is a centre of scientific and technological excellence in the Middle East. Its members include countries from Iran to Israel to Palestine, from Cyprus to Turkey. And the EU has contributed a great deal to it. It may still take time for the science of SESAME to have significance for the whole world. But already, it holds great significance at regional level. And in this context I am glad that the EU has obtained observer status earlier this year to SESAME, allowing European researchers to join in.

The events of the Arab Spring called for a new vision for Cooperation in Research and Innovation between the EU and the Mediterranean countries, which would create the conditions for developing a new cooperation partnership. Our European Neighbourhood Policy was updated to take account of the

developments in the Mediterranean. In May 2011 the EU published a joint communication on a new approach to strengthening the partnership between the EU and the Neighbourhood countries.

In terms of research and innovation, the focus is on working towards the development of a “Common Knowledge and Innovation Space” that would pull together policy dialogue, national and regional capacity building, cooperation in research and innovation, as well as greater mobility for our researchers. This approach was recently reconfirmed when the revised European neighbourhood Policy was launched (18/11/2015), speaking of “connectivity” as a key priority of EU and Neighbourhood countries relations and emphasising the objective of increased participation of neighbourhood countries in EU initiatives, among which figured the connection to GÉANT, our pan-European R&D network. An important basis for our approach, both in the EU and with our Mediterranean partners, is an awareness of the role that science, research and innovation play in economic and social well-being, and of the importance of coordinating national efforts to tackle our common societal challenges.

Our programme Horizon 2020, the EU’s programme for Research and Innovation for the period 2014 – 2020, takes full account of the need to integrate efforts and to cooperate to tackle societal challenges, and it is our principal instrument for supporting Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in research and innovation. With an overall budget of 80 billion Euro over seven years, Horizon 2020 will present a wealth of opportunities for researchers in EU and Mediterranean countries to work together.

HE Mr. Joy concluded by emphasising the incredible power of science and research for diplomacy. It is the elevated language of science which unites even mortal enemies. Scientists don’t wage wars. They solve problems. They come together to reveal the mysteries of the universe. and he hoped the e-AGE 2015 conference will contribute to find common solutions to the common challenges we all face.