

Androulla Vassiliou – Education and Training Commissioner

Opening speech

Launch of the Marie Curie SmartEN Programme
Limassol, Cyprus – 23 April 2010

Speech

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Mr. President, Minister,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today to launch the Marie Curie Initial Training Network (ITN),
Smart Management for Sustainable Human Environment.

The "Initial Training Networks of Researchers" is one of the 5 lines of actions funded by the "People Programme" under the 7th Framework Programme for Research, with a total budget of around 4.75 billion Euros.

Marie Curie actions in this field aim to upgrade researchers' skills by training them in the earliest stages of their career, improving their employability while boosting innovation in Europe. ITNs are set up as multi-partner networks bringing together complementary providers of research training from different countries, sectors and disciplines, to develop the future generations of entrepreneurial researchers who will lead our knowledge-based economy and society.

I must admit that I am delighted to have this programme within my field of responsibility as Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth.

SmartEN is a substantial project and a real success story. It showcases what is best about European research cooperation.

This programme will reach directly into the gaps that Europe must fill, if we are to become a truly innovative, smart and sustainable society –

- training promising young researchers;
- opening new frontiers of knowledge,
- and creating a united front between business, education and research to pursue world-class innovation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In a Europe shaken by the economic crisis, and facing increasing globalisation and competition, this is the kind of knowledge triangle endeavour that we need. This is the kind of breakthrough initiative that the Commission's new Europe 2020 strategy identifies as vital for taking us out of the crisis and into sustainable growth.

Europe must become more innovative. Our flagship European Institute for Innovation and Technology is modelling new partnerships between business, research and education. For, in order to succeed, we must put excellent education, training and research at the heart of our efforts, as Europe 2020 insists.

We need to be able to train, motivate and inspire high-quality young professionals, especially in research, if we are to build up our capacity to turn knowledge and ideas into innovations.

This is the guiding principle of the European Union's Marie Curie Actions.

Marie Curie initiatives not only produce high quality research. They help shape Europe's innovation landscape.

And let me encourage you to keep strengthening the Marie Curie presence here in Cyprus: its impact reaches both deep and far.

Marie Curie Actions help researchers to become tomorrow's innovators and entrepreneurs. They boost the transfer of knowledge across different sectors and countries, promoting the research excellence and international collaboration which benefits society as a whole.

Moreover, the scheme has a particular focus on closer cooperation between higher education and business. I am therefore very glad to see such an active and visible role for industry in SmartEN's research and training programme.

Strong interaction between these two worlds is how we will better link research to today's needs, speeding up development of new products, processes and services for our changing and more demanding environment.

This partnership also improves researchers' skills and boosts their employability, focussing on market needs. It opens researchers' eyes to the career opportunities that await them, both inside and outside of academia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mobility is another key-word for Marie Curie Actions. Researchers moving freely in Europe not only gain new knowledge and further their career. They make Europe more attractive internationally as a destination to study, work and do research. This year, 2010, will see the number of past and present Marie Curie fellows reach 50,000. We shall certainly be celebrating this milestone later in the year!

Marie Curie is set to make a strong contribution to the Europe 2020 flagship initiative, "Youth on the move".

We are proposing that mobility for learning should become the norm for young Europeans, and want to make it possible for all young people in Europe to have this opportunity. This is how we can forge a new European generation fully equipped to cope with the new global challenges, with a deepened sense of European identity, openness and cooperation.

Being mobile means learning from different educators, testing personal assumptions and competences in new situations. Mobility boosts skills and breaks down stereotypes and barriers between people, organisations and countries. Institutions that share knowledge in this way break out of national or local patterns, and build a body of knowledge and skills that will strengthen Europe's competitiveness.

I am very pleased that the SmartEN programme is built on mobility. This mobility is twofold: it encompasses not only individuals but also the free movement of knowledge, shared between universities, research institutes and business enterprises.

I would like to finish, ladies and gentlemen, by congratulating my compatriots in taking the lead in this initiative. The competition for funding was particularly intense: only 106 projects were funded from 900 applications, demonstrating the excellence of the initiative. Professor Onoufriou and her team have everything to gain from this programme, and Europe will gain from its success. With Europe 2020, we want to build an 'Innovation Union'. Your project will be a solid building block.

Prof Onoufriou, I take this opportunity to congratulate you and your 14 partners from across Europe once again and wish you continued success with the SmartEN programme.

Thank you.