

## **Greek launch of Horizon 2020 – 10 January 2014**

Ladies and gentlemen,

The start of Horizon 2020 is an important milestone. It contributes to our efforts to build a stronger, more innovative and much more competitive Europe and improve quality of life for everyone.

This is particularly relevant for coastal and maritime sectors. Untapping their potential is vital for Europe's future and will get us closer to the Europe 2020 goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

To do so, we have presented our Blue Growth Strategy which focuses on those areas that carry the biggest economic promise: marine energy, marine biotech, seabed resources, aquaculture and tourism. If we invest in these sectors the benefits will be exponential.

The maritime sector already employs 5.4 million people across Europe, working in professions as diverse as shipbuilding, tourism or offshore wind energy. But it could employ 7 million by 2020. And that is where the opportunity for Europe lies in these challenging times.

We believe that a little 'push' can make a real difference for these sectors to blossom: we need to give them easier access to finance; better research and innovation capacity; less obstacles to growth; and a workforce that is skilled and qualified not only for today's, but for tomorrow's technology.

These challenges are particularly relevant for maritime nations like Greece. Last year we have commissioned a study to identify for each EU Member State the most promising maritime activities with opportunities for Blue Growth. For Greece, the preliminary results show that the most promising marine and maritime activities are marine aquaculture, cruise and maritime tourism and yachting and marinas. Aquaculture is a strategic sector of the Greek economy, with a significant contribution to growth, employment and the trade balance. It is facing many challenges ahead and scientific research can help respond to these challenges, for instance through the introduction of new species for cultivation, environmental techniques and cost-reducing technologies. In the same vein, scientific research in Greece can play a substantial role to develop maritime activities such as blue biotechnology or marine energy.

We have included a strong focus on Blue Growth in the new Horizon 2020 programme. For the first two years alone, Horizon 2020 could feed a substantial amount of 275 million euro into the blue economy:

175 million euro of the Horizon 2020 budget is directly earmarked for Blue Growth and fisheries. This will provide support for example for research on seabed mapping or spatial planning or to look at juveniles and how we deal with discards.

In addition, another 100 million euro is ready to be taken up by blue economy as part of the projects on climate, energy and transport, looking for example at new ocean energy technologies. Of course, here, other research proposals will compete with marine ones. But I think that marine connected proposals have a really good chance.

And this does not even include all the further funding available for topics like research on biofuels, including on marine algae, approaches to reduce, reuse or recycle food waste and for small and medium sized enterprises. As you know the SMEs are the backbone of our blue economy.

So, for all these areas, we are asking the scientific community and researchers to open up to marketable innovations and applications, and we are asking the business community to play its part.

We can build on the experiences under the Framework Programme 7. The involvement of the Mediterranean scientist and institutes in European research has been very significant and we already financed some 30 projects with a strong Mediterranean component between 2007 and 2012, for a total of 100 million euro in the last three years only.

In fact, one of the best examples comes from right here in Greece, where the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research coordinates 'PERSEUS', an integrated project studying the pressures exerted on the marine environment of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. This big project, now at its halfway mark, is worth 17 million, 13 of which financed by the Commission.

Now, with 2014 being proclaimed the "Year of the Mediterranean" by the Greek and Italian Presidencies, we will have a strong incentive to maximise the opportunities that Horizon 2020 offers.

For 2014 specific potential lies in further involvement of the Mediterranean partners in the research projects implemented under the Action Plan for a Maritime Strategy in the Atlantic area. This includes the sea bed mapping projects that can give very good know-how for the sea bed mapping of the Mediterranean Sea.

A lot has already been done on this front also in the Mediterranean and I welcome the active role of the Hellenic Centre of Marine Research in mapping fishing and maritime activities, sensitive marine ecosystems, the basic habitats of the main species, and the condition of the Mediterranean fish stocks.

In 2015, projects dealing with climate change, fisheries, aquaculture, oil spill and marine pollution will be very relevant to Mediterranean actors. As will the projects to support SMEs, for which Horizon 2020 provides a facility on access to capital financing, of an amount of more than 650 million for just the first 2 years.

We also have a framework for Blue Growth in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, thanks to the macro-regional strategy adopted in 2012. The next step, for 2014, is an Action plan for the area, linking research, innovation, development of SMEs and capacity building, which will be underpinned under the 2015 calls.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we move from the 7th Framework Programme to Horizon 2020, I am very proud that Blue Growth is now part and parcel of the EU Research and Innovation Programme and I encourage you to continue your good work and to make full use of the opportunities Horizon 2020 offers.