

Welcome Address in the 2nd Meeting of the EUROMED Forum on the Information Society
in name of the Presidency of the EU

by Luis Magalhães, President of the Knowledge Society Agency, Portugal

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is for me a great pleasure to address you a few words of welcome to this Forum in name of the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union. And I mean it **very sincerely** and **not merely as rhetoric**.

It does not come only from the fact that I preside to the Knowledge Society Agency, the public agency in charge of coordinating information society and e-infrastructures policies in Portugal.

It is especially because yesterday I had the **great privilege** of attending the EU-MED Event dedicated to e-infrastructures and networking for research and education with the EU-Mediterranean countries cooperation projects. I see here around the table some persons who have also been in this remarkable event.

I was indeed very much impressed

by the activity developed in relation to EUMEDCONNECT,
by the actual physical network that has been implemented,
by the more than 100 application projects in R&D and areas of social interest that were developed,
by the strong connections established with EU institutions and people.

I witnessed the **very strong commitment** of a quite **impressive group of very good people** who came from the non-European Mediterranean countries to discuss these issues. People really committed to pursue cooperation with EU. People driven by **a determination to make progress happen** in the benefit of present and future citizens of their countries and in strengthening the links with the EU Science and Technology community.

It was indeed a **very constructive meeting**, marked by **open attitudes**, and by a **lucid discussion** of difficulties and ambitions to overcome them in an **unusual direct and realistic** fashion. It was for me a very **illuminating experience**.

A matter of concern in the event was that the European funds to pursue support to EUMEDCONNECT and EUMEDGRID have not been assigned yet. As a consequence, there is a risk of discontinuity of these programs.

Let me be absolutely clear on this matter.

We, in the Portuguese Presidency of the EU, are **very much in favour of strengthening the scientific cooperation of EU with external Mediterranean countries**,

because we consider it of **special strategic importance**,
because **building up international knowledge networks** is of foremost importance in a globalizing world of knowledge-based economies,
because tapping on **value arising from collaborative work involving cultural and regional diversity** is particularly productive and rewarding.

Besides, as the basic infrastructure for operation of networks of knowledge is e-infrastructure, it seems **absolutely necessary to pursue, to strengthen and even to expand e-infrastructure projects such as EUMEDCONNECT and EUMEDGRID**, and to take benefit of this infrastructure to further **develop around specific R&D projects the scientific cooperation** between researchers of non-European Mediterranean countries and EU that was very much increased with the contribution of these projects, as the very high increase of traffic flows in the EUMEDCONNECT networks in the past few years clearly demonstrates.

We think it is rather unfortunate that the necessary European funds for the continuation and development of these projects could not be assured yet.

Very clearly, we think this problem has to be solved in a decisive way and as quickly as possible, as we are sure the Commission will find in short time a way to guarantee the allocation of the possible funds for these very important projects, both to Non-European Mediterranean countries and to European Union itself.

I wish to all of you a fruitful Forum and that it really contributes to advance in the preparation of the ministerial conference that will take place in Cairo in February 2008 and, most importantly, to strengthening the cooperation between the non-European Mediterranean countries and the European Union to which the Portuguese Presidency of EU considers of the highest importance.