

Speech Lines for Keynote Intervention at the 1st Euro-Africa Cooperation Forum on ICT Research

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Honourable Ministers
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is for me a great privilege to address you a few words on Euro-Africa cooperation on ICT research.

It is not only due to my responsibility of the Knowledge Society Agency, the public agency in charge of coordinating information society and e-infrastructure policies in Portugal, and of accelerating the creation and use of knowledge and emerging technologies of global reach, such as ICT and nanotechnology, with a strong emphasis on internationalization.

It is especially because we care very much for strengthening the scientific cooperation of European Union with Africa, because we consider it of **special strategic interest** for both regions, 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.

As the basic infrastructure for operation of networks of knowledge now-a-days is e-science, it is absolutely necessary **to pursue, to strengthen and to expand e-infrastructure projects such as AFRICACONNECT, to facilitate online access of African researchers to the most relevant scientific literature;** an example is the agreement we signed this very month with the University of Cape Verde extending to Cape Verde the access to part of our national “big deal” subscription of major international scientific journals that my agency makes fully available online to the Portuguese universities, polytechnics and research institutions; **also to jointly develop open access scientific repositories,** as we intend to do within the Portuguese speaking countries of Europe, Africa, America and Asia; **and, most of all, to benefit of such an infrastructure for further developing scientific cooperation between researchers** of African and European states around specific Research and Development projects.

Allow me to address for a while some questions of ICT and society as we have here so many of the most influential actors on these issues in Africa and it would be a shame to miss this rare opportunity. It will seem a detour, but if your bear with me you will hopefully see how it is intrinsically related to ICT research.

ICT is an enabling technology that interferes with all sectors of economy and public life, like electricity was in the past century, and nanotechnology will be in the future. The Internet, computer, cellular phones, and other developments of ICT such as optical fibre and digital TV, deeply transformed and will continue to transform the way people live – the way they learn, research, work, use their free time and interact – as well in personal relationships as with organizations.

High debit broadband infrastructure is essential to overcome the new divides that happen when powerful new technologies are deployed. We will see the currently most common factors for the digital divide – educational attainment, age, rurality and cost of access – to be overshadowed by territorial infrastructure with Next Generation Networks, similarly to what happened in the last century with road networks. Assuring widespread broadband access is a major strategic priority that goes in pair with policies to facilitate and intensify the use of ICT. It is on these points that cooperation for development in ICT must be focused.

The importance of the Internet to economy and society worldwide leads to the consideration of its governance.

There is a tendency in certain intergovernmental *fora* to concentrate on the question of who manages the assignment of names and numbers in the Internet and its servers, and some defend a discontinuity on the way this is presently managed through ICANN. A few words on this. Recent history has shown that this management scheme is itself a

very innovative concept, both public and private, and extremely successful as a global multistakeholder venture that has proved to be able to steer adequately the tremendous growth in the technical and organizational challenges of the Internet, a model that tends to emerge in many other global domains and cannot be subsumed in traditional intergovernmental agencies of Max Weber style hierarchical bureaucracies of industrial times.

This concept is deeply rooted in the network society paradigm, brought by the Internet itself, and on its societal values of freedom and inclusion. It has worked with remarkable success and we should better not tamper too much, too fast, with it.

The movement of the World Summit for the Information Society and its Internet Governance Forum in the United Nations is another development along the same multistakeholder involvement, of public and private actors, of technical, research, business, user and social and development concerned communities.

Information Society and the Internet are essentially about people. It would be a serious mistake to overemphasize technology. This is why, regarding the United Nations involvement in this area, I am particularly happy to see in this Forum the strong commitment of UNESCO.

In Portugal, we see the strengthening of these movements as absolutely essential to win the silent war for the control of Internet services that was launched by the large suppliers of telecommunications and their desire to absorb the business openly done at the end points of the network. We understand the interest of these companies, but it will be like killing the goose of the golden eggs. Curbing the **open and highly distributed technological developments at the end points of the network** will stop the golden eggs of **generative innovation with the Internet**. This is the other reason why I brought this issue to attention in a forum dedicated to ICT research. It is because **the opportunities and the potentialities of ICT research, and especially the space for intercontinental cooperation on ICT research, so much depend on it.**

As in many other instances of public life, politics has a very important word to say.

So, I would like to leave with you the question on how should Africa and the European Union work together in these new global multistakeholder *fora*, like ICANN and IGF, to safeguard their common interests and the shared opportunities for development?

Let me now return to the central issues of research cooperation. But let us have clear ideas on what matters the most in scientific cooperation. Research is essentially built on **human talent** and **deep and intensive collaboration** between different persons, like most other high human achievements in culture, art and quality of life. It is mainly about human beings and not technology. For this reason, we should give special attention to provide opportunities for effective joint research work involving scientists with common interests in different regions of the world – as in Africa and Europe. Science thrives as much on talent and access to adequate resources, as on the **personal interactions of different bright minds** and on **true friendship**. Thus, providing support for cooperative research projects that emphasize **capacity building of human resources** and **interaction between scientists** of different countries and regions is particularly important.

Knowledge is a very peculiar resource, very different from other economic resources. Contrary to material resources, when you give knowledge to others, you do not lose a little bit of it: you keep all the knowledge you had and the others will gain new knowledge; and, besides, in the process of transferring knowledge most frequently you end up adding to your own pre-existing knowledge an extra amount. It is a true miracle of multiplication. This is why scientific cooperation is so promising and can be win-win for all.

Knowledge provides powerful means to create wealth and improve the quality of life of people. It is one of the most solid foundations of fruitful cooperation. ICT has currently such a basic role in all sectors of economy and society – as in transforming education, in improved energy-environment-transportation systems, in better health and active aging, in the transformation of business and government – that ICT research deserves a very special attention.

Let us all concentrate on achieving concrete results of the Euro-Africa cooperation in scientific research and we will enrich economically, socially and culturally the people in both our continents.