

Speech at the IST-Africa 2011 Opening Plenary

by **Luis Magalhães**

European co-Chair of the Africa-European Union Partnership on Science, Information Society and Space
President of the Knowledge Society Agency, Portugal

Gaborone International Convention Centre, Gaborone, Botswana, 11 May 2011

Honourable Minister
Distinguished Members of Parliament
Representatives of Member States of the African Union and of the European Union
Representatives of the African Union Commission and of the European Commission
Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me start by thanking Botswana and the organizers for the warm hospitality and the excellent conference that was put together.

It is for me a great privilege to address you a few words in the IST Africa 2011 Conference.

Since just two months ago my involvement with the Africa-European Union Partnership has much increased since I became the European co-Chair of the so called 8th Partnership, this is, that focused on Science, Information Society and Space.

In fact, I have been following closely the Information Society component of the Africa-European Union Partnership since its very beginning at the Lisbon UE-Africa Summit of 2007, as part of my responsibility as President of the Knowledge Society Agency of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education of Portugal, 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.

The Africa-European Union 8th Partnership is of special strategic interest for both regions for several reasons, but I would like to highlight two:

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

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, computers, mobile phones (and their “smart” kinds), 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, take care of health, use 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 communication 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 hand-in-hand with policies to facilitate and intensify the use of ICT.

But **Information Society and the Internet are essentially about people**. It would be a serious mistake to overemphasize technology. We have to pay particular attention to the silent war for the control of Internet services that was launched by some of the large suppliers of telecommunications and to their desire to capture the business value done at the endpoints of the network. An economic struggle that also involves pressure for the involvement of traditional telecommunications organizations on Internet Governance seeking to take the place of the current

multistakeholder open processes involving, on equal standing, public and private actors of the technical, research, business, users and social development concerned communities.

We understand the interest of those companies on the value opportunities provided by the Internet, but it would be like killing the golden eggs goose. Curbing the **open and highly distributed applications development that can be done at the endpoints of the network** would stop the golden eggs of **generative innovation with the Internet**. **The opportunities and potentialities of ICT research, and the space for intercontinental cooperation on ICT research so much depend on preserving openness and the end-to-end principle of the Internet.**

I also think we should have clear ideas on what matters the most in scientific cooperation and let me share with you my opinion on this question. 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. 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 brilliant 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; besides, in the process of transferring knowledge 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. 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 ageing, 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 Africa-EU cooperation in scientific research, information society and space and we will enrich economically, socially and culturally the people in both our continents.

Thank you very much for your attention.