



5th COTEC EUROPE SYMPOSIUM

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Your majesty the king of Spain
The president of Portugal
The president of Italy
Ministers
The chairmen of COTEC Spain and Portugal
Ladies and gentlemen

The 5th COTEC Europe symposium, in which COTEC Italy takes part with its customary enthusiasm, has a dual significance, as a result both of the progress COTEC has made in these years and of the particular conditions we are experiencing at the moment.

For, on the one hand, the 5th symposium bears witness to COTEC's unflinching support for the competitiveness of our three countries and the Mediterranean region in general, as well as its ability to identify and make the most of common strengths in the field of research and innovation.

On the other, today's is the first COTEC symposium held in the midst of a profound global financial and economic crisis, which is having a significant effect upon the economic and social fabric of our countries.

This situation – whose far-reaching consequences we cannot ignore – presents government and business decision-makers with strategically important choices, both as regards managing the crisis

and its effects, and as regards the new economic order that will emerge once this phase is past.

Alongside the primary effects of the crisis, such as the credit crunch and the fall in consumer spending (which themselves damage production and business) there are further difficulties which affect policies on research and innovation.

Unquestionably, the potential reduction of company budgets and the concentration of public funds on other needs can reduce support for innovation and competitiveness.

We know that the crisis demands, to a great extent, short-term measures, whereas innovation (both on the level of the whole economy and on that of individual businesses) takes a broader approach and needs to be supported by a strategic vision that looks beyond the immediate circumstances.

COTEC Europe must therefore act in a way that helps to resolve this dichotomy.

Research and innovation confirm their importance just when it is necessary to regain competitive momentum, because investing in new skills and new ways of thinking not only results in new products but also brings access to new markets and produces new organisational structures.

At the same time, supporting technological competitiveness is, on all levels, the most reliable way – especially in the medium and long term – to meet higher levels of global demand and seize the opportunities offered by economic recovery.

Industrial production therefore plays a key role in increasing the competitive potential of the economy as a whole. Indeed, it is the job of companies to produce virtuous cycles that hinge on innovation, identifying growth sectors and new technologies for the future.

In this context big companies, which can gauge the outlook and have sufficient critical mass, will continue to be the driving force, taking with them the innovative capacity of small and medium-sized companies and of the economic system as a whole.

Alongside these aspects there is the work of institutions, especially as regards the use of public demand as an instrument to support and disseminate innovation, especially in situations where economies demand renewed impulse. Digitalisation and e-government, to name but two aspects, offer important opportunities to improve public services and, at the same time, to improve competitiveness.

The contributions seen today bear eloquent witness to the way COTEC Europe's network comprises skills and knowledge that can provide a vision that favours and inspires increased competitiveness in the Mediterranean region, an area with significant growth potential.

The renewal of our three countries' commitment to culture and tourism, thanks also to the use of new technologies, and support for innovation by small and medium-sized companies (which constitute by far the bulk of the economy) are undoubtedly part of a wider plan, aimed at bringing the excellence of our economies and businesses to the attention of European decision-makers.

The importance of COTEC's work also lies in identifying, under the aegis of the heads of the state of the three countries, common research priorities, which must translate into projects that make a significant contribution to the technological and innovative development of the Mediterranean region, in keeping with the cues given by the EU treaty for putting in place research and development programmes common to several member states.

COTEC acts as an international think tank that can be a reference point, at a European level, to identify priorities for technological development and for formulating the appropriate policies to support this.

History has also shown, moreover, how Italy, Spain, and Portugal have been able to meet challenges, drawing above all on their cultural, social, and intellectual resources.

I do not think I am being unduly optimistic when I say that the entities that are responsible for industrial production and innovation in our three countries – companies, academic and research institutions, and

public bodies – have all the credentials for continuing to support technological competitiveness effectively.

At the same time, support for research and innovation must continue to be high on the agenda of government decision makers, beyond the demands made by present circumstances.

The strands of work carried out by COTEC Italy over the past year have gone in this very direction, with the goal of supporting innovation as a response to the crisis, and of giving the players in the so-called “triple propeller” – companies, academia, and institutions – the tools for the job.

In this sense, it is to be hoped that the links between businesses and the academic world may be further strengthened, so as to make the best and most complete use of the transfer of expertise and the sharing of technological developments.

Especially, it is vital to capitalise on the contribution of new knowledge (the so-called intangible assets) produced within entities, such as, for example, technological universities, which are updating their expertise through closer links with the private sector.

The transfer of knowledge and technology from academic and research institutions – especially in the earliest and riskiest stages – is in fact beneficial for the whole industry.

This demands commitment of human resources and the dissemination of scientific and technical knowledge – an area in which our countries are behind our main industrialised partners.

Our countries possess great innovative potential, the result of a mentality open to what’s new and in the future, as well as of the crucial ability to combine resources and skills.

COTEC Europe will continue – also through the new mechanisms that have emerged from the 5th symposium – to work for the competitiveness of the Mediterranean region, and to and to be a touchstone for innovation policies in Italy and Europe as a whole.

Thank you.