

**Prime Minister's Opening Address for the Official National launch of the
Seventh Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development
and Demonstration (FP7) (2007-2013)**

15th February 2007

I am delighted to be here with you, Malta's research community, on this important day for research and innovation, with the launch of the European Union's new Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration in Malta (Seventh Framework Programme FP7).

FP7 marks a major step forward in the Union's efforts to strengthen the drive towards achieving the European Research Area, to which we would add innovation - the European Research and Innovation Area - given the growing interaction and convergence of the two. This joined-up R&I governance approach is strongly reflected in our **National Strategic Framework for R&I (2007-2010)**, entitled '**Building and Sustaining the R&I Enabling Framework**' which projects a vision for '*Research and Innovation at the heart of the Maltese economy to support value-added growth and wealth*'.

Malta is keen to contribute toward the current drive to re-launch the European Research Area initiative. In this respect, we note that the re-launch of the ERA takes account of the different and highly dynamic contexts and realities of different member states and the specific R&I needs of small countries. The new ERA could allow more space for developing customised jointly agreed approaches, appropriate intermediate and realistic targets and also provide a package of support in relation to this through Framework Programmes and other instruments.

Within this context, it is important to note that since EU membership, Malta has been in fast catch-up mode in the area of research and innovation and has made strong efforts in recent years to strengthen the R&I governance and institutions and boost public funding as well as leverage private sector funding.

My Government has recognised that the need for more structured approaches for facilitating science-community interactions is a means for addressing better important policy and governance concerns. Indeed the key policy challenges currently facing Europe, in particular the Lisbon and Gothenburg targets, depend on the active cooperation and involvement of citizens and the community as a whole. Apart from this utilitarian perspective, citizens and the community at large, have both the right and duty to be informed about how developments in science and technology are impacting on society, in order that they may have an informed say on related policy directions and decisions and eventually contribute to and are engaged in their implementation.

Our current R&I drive is obviously shaped by the realities of our situation, namely the lack of critical mass and our dependence on international collaboration in science and technology. This has led us to focus more on business-oriented and industry-driven R&I. A comprehensive package of measures is proposed in the **National Strategic Framework for R&I** involving both demand-side and supply-side approaches, focused on four key priority sectors: ICT, energy and the environment, value-added manufacturing and health/biotechnology.

The **National Strategic Framework for R&I** marks an important milestone as the first long-term R&I strategy which focuses investments on a defined set of

priorities and targets together with key performance indicators for the human capital base in science, engineering and technology, industry-academia collaboration, current and future R&I capacity and growth and wealth creation.

The international dimension is strongly emphasized with the setting up of an institutional framework to take the European-Mediterranean R&I concept forward. The development of the EuroMediti initiative can be seen as a means for generating sufficient critical mass for R&I and North-South technology transfer, by addressing a Euro-Mediterranean market. This initiative is currently focusing its efforts on engaging the public and private sector players in R&I in Europe and the Mediterranean in the development of a technology and innovation platform for Euro-Med business-driven services.

Our new Plan aims to leverage public investments in R&I up to 0.75% of GDP by 2010. Our resource constraints have led us to allocate a relatively high proportion of our structural funds in 2007-2013 for research, innovation and higher education, invest our efforts in more demand-side R&I measures including public procurement and better regulation. We are also in the process of introducing new legislation to encourage inward researcher mobility. We trust that these efforts to strengthen our national R&I system will put our researchers in a stronger position to participate in the Framework Programme.

We are aware of the important impact of Framework Programme participation on Science and Technology and the economy, and the integration of the European Research Area. Indeed, there is no doubt that EU membership and participation in EU R&I programmes has had and is having a highly significant impact on Malta's research and innovation system in a number of ways which

are often difficult to capture in totality. A high proportion of EU projects are supporting capacity-building in the public and private sectors, whilst other benefits relate to policy learning through the benchmarking of science and technology policy strategies and related mutual learning processes between member states, opened up through the open method of coordination. Malta's participation in Framework Programme projects has continued to grow from FP5 to FP6 with Malta achieving one of the highest success rates for proposal submissions per capita among EU member states.

The new FP7 programme opens up some very exciting prospects for our researchers in the public and private sectors and marks new challenges for Malta to extend and further improve its participation, both quantitatively and more importantly qualitatively in FP7. Malta's record of participation in the Framework Programme is impressive given our small size, limited past investments in this sector and lack of critical mass. Our drive in FP7 is to ensure a more effective and qualitative participation especially by SMEs, in line with our national R&I Plan priorities.

I would like therefore to end my address today with this challenge for FP7 and to wish you good work with your endeavours.