

Ladies and Gentlemen,
dear distinguished guests,

I am honoured to welcome you on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic to this workshop focused on researchers' careers and their support.

Today, researchers find themselves in a bit dichotomic situation. On one hand, researchers now have easier and quicker access to an unprecedented amount of information from around the world. Global communications technology allows collaboration on the individual, national, and international levels like never before, which facilitates the research process as a whole. On the other hand, they are working in the most competitive research environment ever known. Grant applications are increasing, funding opportunities are decreasing, and funding bodies are increasing their requirements and expected outcomes. Thus, the researchers have better, broader, and faster access to more information and technology than at any other time in history, however the funds necessary to benefit from these resources and fulfill the full promise of research are moderate and growing slowly.

The young researchers are especially affected by this dichotomy. Having learned their research skills and earned their Ph.D.s in this new age full of technology and possibilities, they are keenly aware of their potential. However, without the years of experience, they are often at a disadvantage when applying for grants. Though they are new in the field and full of fresh ideas and perspectives, funding bodies are often hesitant to award grants to junior researchers without the presence of senior researchers on their teams. Without funding, early career researchers are at risk of reducing their productivity and contributions.

Knowledge is the currency of the new economy. The tendencies to emphasize the role of human capital, knowledge, skills and competencies and respective intangible outputs, such as the know-how, patents, etc., are emerging. People are a key factor, and in the interaction with other factors, they create added value and thus contribute to ensuring the competitiveness of the society as a whole. The field of research and development depends on human potential and knowledge more than other fields. In this field, it is necessary to support the development of intangible capital – people and their ideas, knowledge, and link it to real tangible outputs and outcomes of the research.

This is why this topic is an important part of the Europe 2020 strategy which aims to turn the European Union into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy that delivers high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion within the so called Innovation Union policy. A key element of the Innovation Union involves completion of the European Research Area, aiming to increase the competitiveness of European research institutions by bringing them together and encouraging a more inclusive way of work. Increased mobility of knowledge workers and deeper cooperation among EU research institutions are central ERA goals.

The ERA should inspire the best talents to enter research careers in Europe and encourage industry to invest more in European research. It will enable European researchers to develop

strong links with partners around the world, so that Europe benefits from the advancement of knowledge worldwide and contributes to global development.

One of the ERA priority areas is the development of an open labour market for researchers to ensure the removal of barriers to researcher mobility, training and attractive careers. The May 2015 Council conclusions on the ERA Roadmap for the period 2015-2020 highlighted the role of human capital in the advancement of the ERA and the necessity to strengthen comprehensive human resources strategies including mobility of researchers by providing them with attractive career pathways.

Measures to support young researchers and the attractiveness of scientific careers are part of the Dutch-Slovak-Maltese trio Presidency programme. Within the ongoing Slovak Presidency, we believe that young, talented people are the driving force for development, innovation and economic growth. Supporting young researchers, raising the attractiveness of a scientific career and promoting investment in human capital in research and development is therefore a priority for the Slovak Presidency.

The topic of supporting young researchers was discussed at the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Competitiveness which took place in July in Bratislava. The discussion pointed out that the support of early stage researchers should be further developed. The young researchers should be provided more stable research posts and given the opportunity to lead their own research teams. Imagine that the great scientists such as Galileo Galilei, Blaise Pascal and Albert Einstein made their breakthrough discoveries in their twenties, or even earlier! Would they have been provided funding for their scientific work today?

On the occasion of the Informal Meeting, the Bratislava Declaration of Young Researchers was presented by the young researchers' representatives and co-authors. The Declaration states that the great ideas and ability are divorced of age, gender or nationality and calls on EU Member States and the European Commission to recognize the special role that young researchers play and aspires to better enable them. In the declaration, the young researchers aspire to enable great people to realize their ideas and to empower them to fully contribute to the scientific community mainly by reorganizing and creating sustainable and effective funding schemes; to sustainable and transparent career trajectories; to a diverse, collaborative, inter-disciplinary, open and ethical research environment with an emphasis on the free and ethical sharing and use of scientific data and ideas; and to a healthy work-life balance, including the childcare and parental care and different types of mobility.

The conclusions on supporting young researchers will be adopted by Council at the end of November.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport of the Slovak Republic, as the main governing body and in the same time main funding body in the field of Science and Technology, has been developing several activities in favor of supporting young researchers and providing them the possibilities of funding. Several existing funding schemes allow the eligible beneficiaries to receive funding to help their careers to progress. The National Grant

Scheme for Student, Doctoral and Post-doctoral Internships Support allows the students and postdocs to work on their theses or projects in the renowned European laboratories under supervision of excellent experts. The “Support of building the personal infrastructure in all R&D sectors in Slovakia for the period 2016-2019” programme aims at improving the competitiveness of Slovakia by fostering the personal infrastructure in R&D, namely creating the postdoc posts, reintegrating the Slovak and foreign experts from abroad, creating the young researchers’ own research teams and funding their excellent projects. Last but not least, the Support Scheme for the Return of Experts from Abroad is intended for the Slovak nationals – young experts and senior experts working abroad to help them come back home so that they can use their experience to contribute to development of Slovak society.

However, there is much more work to be done yet mainly at the policy level in order to provide young researchers all the support necessary, and much more intensive dialogue on career development of researchers to be held.

Ladies and gentlemen,
dear distinguished guests,

Let me finally wish you a successful conference and fruitful discussion. I am confident that the discussion on different stakeholders’ perspectives on this important topic would provide good food for the further dialogue.

Thank you for your attention.