

Welcome by the Rector

Het Pand (Ghent), 14 June 2018

Good morning everyone !

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

ALLEEN HET GESPROKEN WOORD TELT

{welcome}

Dear colleagues from Ghent University,

Thank you for attending this event on research cooperation with our colleagues from Central & Eastern Europe (- a region some of you are natives from). This is an important issue for our university and it is great to see so many of you present here. So, welcome to all of you !

A warm welcome also goes out, of course, to those of you coming from other Belgian universities and higher education institutions, and especially to our external speakers from the European Commission, COST, FWO and the University of Mons.

Dear guests : welcome to the city of Ghent, welcome to Ghent University !

{the new R&I framework programme}

Dear colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen

Last week, the European Commission published its proposal for the new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, which is due to start in January 2021. The Commission says that this new programme, called “Horizon Europe”, will not be a revolution: it will be composed of 3 pillars and a crosscutting part, as is the case for the current Horizon 2020 programme.

That being said, there will for sure be some significant changes. One of the bigger changes is that the importance of Research & Innovation cooperation with Central & Eastern European Countries will increase. Not only (1) the budget for the “Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation” calls is expected to double, moreover (2) the importance of working together with partners in Central & Eastern European Countries in all other “regular” parts of the Framework Programme is expected to increase.

These developments can be seen already today under the “Marie-Sklodowska Curie” Actions. The European Commission reserves a part of the “Marie Curie” budget – or should I rather say the “Marie Sklodowska” budget ? – for Central and Eastern European Countries only. Fellows from these countries whose proposals are evaluated above threshold, but for which no budget is available anymore, get funded from this earmarked pot of money.

So, plenty of reasons, I would say, to gather today, here in “Het Pand”, in order to learn about the current and future opportunities to develop Research and Innovation cooperation with our colleagues in the Central & Eastern part of Europe.

{new neighbours, new partners}

For an impressive lot has changed over a relatively short period of time. Yet at the same time, a lot still has to be done – and the overall context does not always seem to help things move forward.

Indeed, times in Europe were quite different when the Accession procedures were started for those Central & Eastern European Countries which were eventually to become EU members in 2004, 2007 and 2013 respectively. An atmosphere of optimism was then sweeping across the continent, until economic crisis and political turmoil came to put the European Union to the test.

Regretfully, after all these years of pre- and post-accession initiatives, we have to admit that there is still a lack in research and educational cooperation between East and West. Looking at student mobility here at Ghent University, for example, we note that the numbers of incoming students from Central and Eastern European countries are even dropping in the last years, while the numbers of outgoing students remain far from an equilibrium and are only slowly increasing – and it cannot be taken for granted that this will solve itself.

{new neighbours, diverse partners}

Here, it might be good to remind ourselves – and let this be a kind of disclaimer for the rest of the day – that what we conveniently call “Central and Eastern Europe”, the “new member states” or the “EU-13” is by far no homogenous region or a bloc of uniform countries.

A Bulgarian and an Estonian have indeed as little, or as much, in common as an Italian and a Swede. Budapest is not Bucharest. Slovakia is not Slovenia.

Yet at the same time, we all have a lot in common. Being European is what unites us all, East and West.

As a university committed to European integration and as a long-standing beneficiary of EU funding for education, research and innovation, we at Ghent University want to fully take our responsibility and play our role. And therefore we hope that the funding under the current and the new “Horizon” programmes will allow us to further develop existing and establish new links with partners in Central and Eastern Europe. Whether in Bulgaria or Estonia, in Slovakia or Slovenia – or, why not, Slavonia.

For in times in which some political leaders try to make us believe that the stability of the European project and the prosperity of our continent rely on the impermeability of our external borders, I pretty much tend to believe that the stability of the European project and the prosperity of our continent rely much more on our ability to forge strong partnerships across our internal borders.

{today's agenda}

Ladies and gentlemen,

Having said this, I will now quickly guide you through today's agenda.

This morning, Ms Adeline Kroll, representing her Head of Unit Magda De Carli from the Research, Science & Innovation Directorate General of the

European Commission, will tell us everything about the political background behind the Horizon 2020 “Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation” work programme. And she might even give us some inside information regarding the new Framework Programme, Horizon Europe...

Anyway, thank you, Ms Kroll, for having accepted our invitation and for being here with us today.

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The European Cooperation in Science and Technology Programme, better known as COST, is also part of the Framework Programme and will continue to do so in the future. Today, COST receives its budget partly from the Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation work programme. Last week, we learned that from 2021 onwards, the total budget of COST would come from the Spreading Excellence work programme. It is therefore no surprise that COST’s first strategic priority, “promoting and spreading excellence”, will only gain importance under the remaining years of Horizon 2020 and under its successor.

We are therefore very pleased to have Policy Officer Bart Veys of the COST Association as a speaker.

Welcome, Mr Veys, and thank you for having accepted the invitation of your Alma Mater.

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Dear colleagues,

I am confident that the presentations of both Mr Veys, from COST, and Ms Kroll, from the European Commission, will provide us with all

necessary information to start drafting project proposals to make better use of the European funding opportunities for cooperation with Central & Eastern European Countries.

We expect this information also to be useful for the representatives of the other Belgian higher education institutions. Looking at the number of WideSpread projects at our respective universities, we all should be able to make better use of the European funding opportunities. Let's hope this Info Day gives a new impetus.

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The EU, however, is not the only funding organisation allowing for cooperation with partners in Central & Eastern Europe.

FWO also set up mobility and research cooperation programmes. Ms Verbaeys, Head of International Affairs at FWO, will provide us with an overview of FWO funding opportunities that can be used independently of European funding or maybe to prepare for joint European funding or likewise to continue the collaboration.

We are very much looking forward to your presentation, Ms Verbaeys.

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If it is our goal to start up collaboration with academics in other parts of Europe, being aware of the background of the existing programme is an excellent start. And, hopefully, listening to and learning from experienced colleagues will make us enthusiastic to develop these cooperation initiatives ourselves.

We are therefore most delighted to have amongst us today, via a live stream connection, the coordinator of the very first Belgian ERA Chair

project under the Seventh Framework Programme. The pioneer I am talking about is monsieur Frère from the University of Mons. His project started even before Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation calls were introduced in Horizon 2020. You are welcome to fully exploit this unique opportunity by asking him all your questions !

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During the networking lunch, you can get in touch with our EU Office and FWO teams. In case you need some extra clarifications on the terminology you learned in the morning sessions, the FWO and EU Office teams are here to provide advice. Besides, our EU Office itself is experienced since the team is cooperating very actively with partners from the Central & Eastern part of Europe in the COST Action BESTPRAC. Within BESTPRAC, EU Offices from all parts of Europe share best practices for EU proposal and project support services.

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In the afternoon, Professor Lutgart Braeckman, the first Ghent University professor with a Twinning project, called ESPRiT, will present a case study.

Congratulations, professor Braeckman, for having your project idea funded.

I would also like to congratulate professor Rajkovic. A couple of weeks ago, he learned that he will soon be able to start a WideSpread project. Today, as one of the 3 Ghent University ambassadors for the Western Balkans, he will not only discuss with us the possibility to open up his Education-focused ambassadors role towards Research, but he will also

discuss working with partners from the Western Balkans in other 'regular' projects in Horizon 2020.

Indeed the Western Balkans region, where Ghent University has been very active in educational projects in the past decades – this particular region also deserves reinvigorated attention. A month ago, the heads of state reconfirmed their commitment of offering a perspective on EU accession for the countries in the region.

Thank you both in advance, professors Braeckman and Rajkovic, for sharing your experience with us.

{conclusion}

Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I think I have said what I had to say.

I am confident that this Info Day will help us all to contribute to strengthening the European Research Area. Should you feel that a form of structured support for closer cooperation with academics from the Central & European Countries is missing, then your ideas are most welcome during the closing session.

I wish you all an inspiring and useful day...

... and I will now pass the floor to our first presenter, Mr Bart Veys from the COST Association.

[Thank you!]