Honourable Ministers,

Dear Mr Commissioner,

Dear representatives of the countries participating in PRIMA,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to my country and the National Research Foundation in the event on PRIMA initiative today, a few months after its formal adoption, a few weeks before the adoption of the relevant international agreements and a few hours before the first meeting of the General Assembly of PRIMA.

In my capacity as the rapporteur of the European Parliament and in cooperation with the political groups, the Council and in particular the Maltese presidency that set PRIMA as its first priority in the area of Research and Innovation and the European Commission under the responsibility of Mr. Moedas, we have been working intensively since last December, in order to achieve a common goal: ensure that PRIMA will be fully operational by 1-1-2018.

The first ever Public-to-Public Partnership on the legal basis of Article 185 of the Treaty to target a specific geographic area, the Mediterranean Basin which includes the participation of EU neighbouring countries.

19 countries in total, 11 Member States, 3 associated and 5 third countries are jointly undertaking the initiative, in the framework of “Horizon 2020”, with a Union contribution of 220 million euro and an equal contribution of the Participating States.

With a 10-year implementation period, the overall objective of PRIMA is the development and adoption of innovative and integrated solutions for improving the efficiency, safety, security and sustainability of agro-food systems and of integrated water provision and management in the Mediterranean area. An objective fully compatible with the 17 objectives recently agreed UN Sustainable Development Goals and to the forthcoming European Sustainable Development Strategy in the same context.

The overall aim of PRIMA is to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, whereas its specific objective is the coordination and strengthening of the national research and innovation programmes, in the areas addressed, through a multi-actor, multidimensional comprehensive and integrated approach.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The current situation of social and political turmoil in the Mediterranean basin leads us inevitably to reflect upon the root causes of the problem and to urgently search for leverage to promote sustainable development in the region.

An improvement of living conditions is a main demand of the citizens living around the Mediterranean, many of whom confront, on a daily basis, a multidimensional insecurity.

Armed conflicts, external interventions, persecutions, ethnic cleansing, generalised violence, political instability, religious fundamentalism, climate change, natural disasters, unsustainable resource management and a rapidly-growing population are the most critical factors that contribute to forced displacement and migration.

This phenomenon has grown into a humanitarian crisis of an enormous size. A crisis, which is the natural result of concrete policy options and interventions.

In these circumstances, access to food, drinking water and basic sanitation facilities are determining and interconnected challenges and constitute issues of paramount political, social and economic importance in the region.

In this sense, the PRIMA approach seeking, on the one hand, short-term solutions for an immediate response to migratory pressure and on the other significant structural investments to address the root causes of migration and forced expatriation, is an initiative that goes in the right direction.

During the legislative process in the European Parliament and with a view to respond to the citizens’ demands in the region, we focused on and ensured the following:

* PRIMA activities are to have an exclusive focus on civil applications and should respect fundamental rights,
* recognition of the right to unimpeded access to safe and clean drinking water, as a human right,
* support to all types of research and innovation activities for projects addressing a wide range of technology readiness levels and ensuring an appropriate balance between small and large projects,
* a fair and balanced geographical cooperation,
* prevention of participation of external and internal “free riders” by setting specific conditions and sufficient national financial commitments,
* strengthening of the openness of the initiative for all countries willing to participate and
* transparent governance, management and implementation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would once again like to express my satisfaction because together we managed to flesh out this rare attempt of EU science diplomacy, indeed, the first ever, EU Public to Public Partnership to target a specific geographical area, the Mediterranean Basin that includes the participation of EU neighbouring countries.

However, despite my satisfaction I cannot but underline the obvious: The phenomenon of migration is of such dimensions that this initiative, or similar ones, though necessary, are but a drop in the ocean compared to the size of the problem.

Our duty is to support a long-term, comprehensive, coordinated and people-centred strategy and a common policy on migration. A policy away from the current outdated, phobic and ineffective model of a Europe that shields itself, hiding behind walls, fences and barbed wires. Away from introverted rationales and nationalistic policies that serve canvassing and promote populism as their imperative.

Because what we call, “European refugee crisis” has not only pointed out the rigidities and the failures of the European refugee policy. It also highlighted something else, more dangerous. It brought to the surface in the most deafening way, the deadlocks, the rotten foundations and the internal cracks of the EU. It exposed euro-scepticism, xenophobia, incubated fascism. It revealed a smaller, divided Europe, a Europe without solidarity, without a shared vision.

Unfortunately the results of the German elections from yesterday, confirm the above worrying considerations. In the country that plays a dominant role in shaping the internal and external European policy, we witness the rebirth and strengthening of the ideology that spread fear and death almost everywhere in the world. The serpent’s egg does hatch. If we truly desire a common European future, we should stop to pretend, as it was the case in the recent Dutch and French elections, thinking we dealt with the problem.

Today it is more than evident. It is imperative.

Europe needs a common policy based on the principles of true solidarity, fair sharing of responsibility, to guarantee respect for human rights. A common policy that will respect the spirit and the letter of the international conventions and the European law on refugees.

This policy should set as common tools at least the following:

• safe and legal access, legal residency, prospects for legal and decent employment and swift social inclusion,

• brave political initiatives and honest commitments to settle critical geopolitical issues in the region,

• adequate resources and other development initiatives like PRIMA, creating the conditions for sustainable social development of the region and positive incentives for the citizens to remain in their countries, in a peaceful and secure environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our tolerance vis-à-vis the human loss has been selective in a provocative way. The unfortunate ones perished trying to reach safer shores and more welcoming borders. Those who survived from the onslaught of their homelands, the ones not swallowed by the Mediterranean, are perhaps the most fortunate. However, they remain “trapped” between a devastated homeland and a cruel policy followed by those who bear part of the responsibility for this catastrophe.

PRIMA is perhaps a gleam of light, in my view a small but important victory. However, for the people trapped in war situations, generalised violence or extreme poverty, it is by far not enough. It should be coupled by the political determination to put people at the centre of our policies.

Anything less than this and necessarily much more than already done by all of us. Notably in a different direction. It is the only way for Europe to reconnect with its values and its history, to rediscover its identity: an identity shaped by two world wars that left millions of dead, so that intolerance, xenophobia, fascism are finally part of the past.

As politicians as well as EU citizens, we should never forget that the prosperity of Europe and of the entire world is due to the misery and the impoverishment of the peoples of these areas as well. In this context, PRIMA, in contrast with the prevailing political conceptions, shows the direction the United Europe should move towards, both vis-à-vis third countries, and at the level of the EU internal decisions and policies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude my intervention with a creative call. As you know, our country, Greece will participate with EUR 10 million EUR for the 10-year period 2018-2028.

The programme is addressed to higher education institutions, research centres, private and public sector companies, regardless of their size, as well as other entities with activities relevant to the PRIMA priorities, and will involve, primarily, international cooperation projects.

I invite all potential beneficiaries from Greece and their counterparts from all countries participating in PRIMA to full mobilisation and participation. So that this initiative serves effectively the objectives, under which it was adopted.

I call on them to seize this opportunity, to act together in a dynamic way with the organisations from other countries for the implementation of innovative research projects, to contribute to the success of this back loaded initiative, with a view to ensure generous follow-up funding in the next programming period.

I am aware of the work of the research institutes in Greece and especially at a time of economic crisis and social misery. I also understand the profound awareness of the scientific human resources of the country, notably in the area of agro-food and water management, as well as the recognition of the water as a nonmarket social good. In particular, I am aware, due to my own experience, of the traditional links between the Greek business and the land!

I am therefore confident that PRIMA will be embraced with interest, creative disposition and innovative ideas.

I sincerely wish every success and I declare my readiness to support this or similar initiatives.

Thank you for your attention.