



Today, humanity faces many challenges. Science and research are key tools to help overcome them, but without investment they will not succeed. In the European Union, we are acutely aware of this and we are striving to create a society and an economy based on knowledge, which encourages competition in science and research. Crucial to this is the building of strategic partnerships that strengthen our research potential, increase critical mass, and ensure results that benefit us all. We want to make the EU a knowledge

leader, a field which is – and will be – an important source of economic strength and a way to further enhance our reputation, our sincerity and our attractiveness, globally.

The economic crisis has brought us face to face with new challenges and questions, but also new opportunities. But only if we are prepared enough.

This of course also holds true for research into social science and more generally about our societies and the people in them. Attentive and critical analysis of social, political, economic, and cultural phenomena will make a crucial contribution to the overall development of our increasingly interconnected global societies.

I am therefore particularly glad to introduce the new IFIMES Yearbook. IFIMES is an internationally acclaimed and respected organisation which has chosen to focus on two regions which are key to the European's Union's plans to be a true global actor: the Middle East and the Western Balkans.

If we take a brief glance at the titles of the 2007 contributions, distributed by the IFIMES throughout its network, one can see at once the importance, breadth, and complexity of the work involved. There is a real depth of expertise and understanding in their work.

Critical thinking is an important tool, in every field. This is especially true for social science analysis, where 'variables' occur often unpredictably, making them very difficult to measure with any de-

gree of certainty. The results of this research must therefore be combined with those from other fields, particularly the natural sciences, technical fields, and others. In this way, science that is applicable to day-to-day political, cultural, and economic practice can become the driving force for wider social understanding and development.

This is an illustration of how the Lisbon strategy contributes to the development of new and more effective strategic guidance for EU science and research. I am particularly pleased to see the increasing attention dedicated to science in the EU. Research is becoming increasingly seen as a good long-term investment, rather than short-term cost: this is how it should be.

EU enlargement in 2004 provided a real developmental boost, which also encouraged interest in science and research. We have shown that the EU model is a successful one, which in turn shows how successful integrated cooperation and association can work for other countries. Special emphasis needs to be placed on the strategic interests of the Western Balkan countries for closer association with, and full membership of the EU. The EU has been developing strategies for better cooperation with these countries with a view to their eventual full membership. And I am glad that individual Western Balkan countries know just how important science and research can be for their future and for all our futures, and that they continue to invest both money and resources in them.

If we all work together to create a true knowledge society our collective uncertainty can be replaced by confidence. IFIMES' contribution to this is both important and unique. Its research contributes to the future accession of the Western Balkans countries and encourages the growth of civil society, which will benefit them domestically as well as internationally. I wish there were more institutes like the IFIMES contributing such imaginative and useful research.

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Science and Research