

Chief scientist Skourides for Research, Innovation & Technology presents to Cyprus Universities Rectors conference the Strategy Roadmap & Programs rollout of the Research Innovation Foundation supporting the implementation of Cyprus research and innovation strategy 2024-2026.

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, The Chief Scientist for Research, Innovation and Technology of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr Demetris Skourides held an introductory meeting with the Cyprus Universities Rectors conference. The meeting build on the momentum created by a series of milestones delivered by the Chief scientist in his first 10 months since assuming office in September 2023 including a holistic review of Cyprus's Research & innovation ecosystem through 650+ engagements, events, meetings with Research organizations, universities, technology innovation companies, startups, and policy makers. During the period the Chief scientist has held meetings with Ambassadors of Egypt H.E. Mr. Amr Mohsen Hamza, Ambassadors of France H.E. Mrs Salina Grenet-Catalano, Ambassador of Israel H.E. Mr. Oren Anolik, Ambassador of Japan H.E. Mr. YAMAWAKI Yoshio, Ambassador of Sweden H.E. Mr. Martin Hagström, Ambassador of Poland H.E. Mr. Marek Szczepanowski, Ambassador of the kingdom of Netherlands H.E. Mrs. Elke Merks-Schaapveld, and Ambassador of Cuba H.E. Mr. Angel Gustavo Suarez Cordero, focused on potential collaboration and externalizing the Cyprus Research & Innovation ecosystem. In addition, the externalization efforts involved cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign affairs, and the Cyprus chamber of commerce to provide awareness briefings of 30+ ambassadors of Cyprus across the world. In addition, the Chief scientist has led the participation of Cypriot research and innovation ecosystem in international events such as Mobile world congress in Spain, Slush in Finland, Nasa Space Apps in United states, GITEX in UAE, Reflect and LEAP in Saudi Arabia and the Japan Cyprus trade mission in Japan.

Mr Skourides outlined that the first priorities since undertaking office in September 2023 was to Develop the New Strategy with new board energizing the Research Innovation foundation to fulfil the Vision of H.E. President Mr. Nicos Christodoulides making Cyprus a Regional Research, Innovation and Technology hub by 2035. The strategy set forth by the new Board of directors focused on objectives to improve the ecosystem including Simplifying & Streamlining the processes, Improving Quality of Service, Enhancing Customer experience, leverage evidence-based programs that are outcome and impact focused, and embrace transparency. Mr. Demetris Skourides emphasized the importance of evaluation of the investments made in research and innovation and referred to Technopolis group who has carried out evaluations and impact assessment of the research innovation foundation RIF. RIF will continue to work with expert consulting firms with extensive experience in evaluating public funded investments to assess their impact. Acknowledging the importance of innovation for Cyprus, he said, "Ensuring that every investment in resources must contribute to the expansion of the Cypriot Research & Innovation ecosystem is among my top priority."

The magnitude of change required in reducing both complexity and overhead in managing competitive funding calls is substantial, however instrumental for improving the productivity & impact of the R&I ecosystem. Mr Skourides emphasized the commitment of the Research Innovation Foundation in simplifying new rules of participation and introducing a new Grants management system to replace IRIS in 2025 while he has also shared that RIF is working hard to improve Customer service given Cyprus's aspiration to become a regional research, Innovation, and Technology hub. To this extent, the Research innovation foundation has decided to introduce a customer experience review committee with mission to review and evaluate customer experiences questioning existing processes that can help improve the customer experience without compromising auditing requirements. Our aim is to help move the focus from a process-oriented system shifting towards supporting value creation and particularly focused on helping increase presence of researcher and startup, innovator accomplishments. Mr. Skourides outlined a series of simplifications planned and currently under revision with competent authorities including Wages + 40%, Unit Rates, Introducing Lumpsum payment in select programs, budget amendments. Mr. Skourides highlighted that the introduction and expansion in number of programs where these payment methodologies are expected to introduce more agility to research organizations enabling them to focus their time on scientific work, commercialization and hand over the administrative overhead part to overhead admins. Mr. Skourides stressed that the lumpsum payment method is still under discussion with the authorities, however has highlighted the risk that lumpsum payments have a risk of resulting in Zero-sum payments if the scientific work and deliverables cannot be shown leading to risks in payments, and encouraged all companies, organizations engaging in research projects to leverage the administration fees to setup a team handling project management and funding payments. Chief scientist Mr. Demetris Skourides stated that "Researchers and scientists, entrepreneurs should not be burdened with administration, and process compliance matters, and that such time-consuming tasks should be handled by professionals also trained on RIF best practices leveraging the administration fees factored in projects and funding calls".

Mr. Skourides highlighted that whilst Cyprus has achieved consistent growth in the European innovation scoreboard retaining the 10<sup>th</sup> position for a 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row, and improving its innovation posture by 37% since 2016, it is becoming clarify that Cyprus has reached a breaking point where ONE STRATEGY fits all" is not sufficient to provide the growth required to accelerate the research, innovation and technology ecosystems and that further investments are required. Mr. Skourides praised the outstanding work and research excellence achieved by faculty of the public universities and institutes, specifically University of Cyprus, Cyprus University of Technology and the Cyprus Institute who have secured between them 18 ERCs including Advanced grants by Prof Christoforos Pissarides, Johannes Lelieveld, Marios Polycarpou, Triantafyllos

Stylianopoulos. Skourides also commended on the increase in publications in top journals by private universities highlighting investments in Research policies aimed to increase their focus on research. Particular emphasis was placed to the commitment of public universities to reach the highest echelons sharing that the Research innovation foundation is supporting the increase in excellence with targeted programs to increase research excellence aiming for another 3 ERCs by 2027. The programs that lead to internationalization include Vision ERC with a 1M Euro budget, Bridge to Horizon, 6M budget, ERC 2<sup>nd</sup> Opportunity, 0.6M budget and ERC fellowship budget, amounting to a total of 7.8M that will be supporting 10 ERC proposals to be submitted, 40 Bridge-2 -Horizon projects to be funded, Resubmission of excellent ERC submissions and also supporting top researchers to work with ERC grantees. Mr Skourides highlights that he is an avid supporter of the Research capability and quality of the researcher ecosystem and believes that more opportunities should be provided to support Cypriot talent to improve its competitiveness, encouraging both Public and Private universities to leverage such opportunities further pursuing success the prestigious ERC grants. In addition, Chief scientist Mr. Demetris Skourides shared his intention of setting up under his auspices an ERC community taskforce to inspire, mentor and advice hi-potential researchers to pursue ERC grants, and re-iterated his commitment to undertaking a mapping of the Research & scientific ecosystem of Cyprus creating conditions that can make the work of each researcher more visible.

Skourides outlined the support of the government and its commitment in research and innovation sharing that the competitive funding for period 2021-2027 is up by 34% compared to that of period 2014-2020, with a budget of 177.5m Euro. Mr. Skourides shared that the % funding allocation to research is 23%, second to collaboration and knowledge transfer which accounts for 27%, followed by innovation which accounts for 21%, infrastructure and skills at 14% and internationalization at 15%. Whilst acknowledging delays in payments, Skourides has shared data indicating that in its 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of transformation, RIF has enhanced its operational efficiency specifically reducing Time to pay (Days) down from 275 days in 2019 to 61 days in 2023, and time to contract(months) from 21 months to 7 In 2023. We are currently preparing for the 3<sup>rd</sup> transformation where simplifications including a new system to replace IRIS, simplified payments, and the introduction of AI tools such as chatbot Dianna will be gradually rolled out between 2024-2026.

In addition, Skourides further indicated that the total investment to support Research for period 2021-2027 amounts to 36.75M to-date including the two funding calls of Excellence hub amounting to 12M, and post-doc at 2.5M, while another 4.1M will be announced in 2025 to support the researcher ecosystem. The Chief Scientist highlights that the emphasis in Research is reflected by the markable increase of 66% in funding allocation compared to period 2014-2020, and clarified that the research innovation foundation has ensured that funding for fundamental and applied research exists

various programs such as EU partnerships, Bi-lateral agreements, and has also commented on the new Excellence hubs, and Post-Doc programs which have encouraged the increase in Public-Private linkages from 21% to 29% since the 2021 call, whereas the Post-doc funding call has received more than 60% participation from Women researchers paving the way for a major adjustment in gender balance in research supporting the government's effort in supporting Women in STEM. In addition, he said, "the 2024 Excellence Hubs and Post-doc funding calls are expected to support the work of more than 500 researchers.

In his keynote to the Cyprus Universities Rector committee, Chief scientist Skourides re-iterated the importance H.E President Mr. Nicos Christodoulides places on bridging the gap between industry and researcher organizations, and the need to commercialize, and talked about the importance of the Partner innovation day held under his auspices in February 2024, bringing together more than 420 participants across the ecosystem including 43 enterprises & SME, 39 startups, policy makers from Ministry of Health, Energy, and Deputy Ministries of Shipping, and Digital Policy, Research and innovation, 22 consultants, and 69 researchers from major public and private research organizations including the University of Cyprus, Cyprus University of Technology, the Cyprus Institute, Cyprus Institute of Neurology, University of Nicosia, Frederick, and European University of Cyprus. This event was the first of its kind intended to break up silos between researchers, and tech innovators, creating opportunities for accelerating knowledge transfer, innovation and commercialization in the Cypriot R&I ecosystem. Skourides also referred the importance of externalizing the Cypriot R&I ecosystem referring to the facilitation of introductions between Ambassador of Japan H.E. Mr Yoshio Yamawaki and President of Japan Science and Technology Agency JST Mr. Kazuhito Hashimoto with the of Director of Phaethon Prof George Georgiou , and the visit in June of H.E. Deema Alyahya, Secretary general of DCO to Koios Centre of Excellence hosted by Chief scientist, staff of the Deputy Ministry and Professor Constantinos Pittris. These meetings showcased the actual state of art in Cyprus in the domains of green energy, Control infrastructures, digital twins, and how the researcher community is supporting public sector and private industries. Mr Skourides added that the Cyprus centres of excellence can be viewed as ecosystem accelerators whose infrastructure and expert resources can be leveraged by companies and new entrants to accelerate their digital journeys. Both Cypriot based opportunities, innovative new entrants, and startups should look into such cross-industry collaboration between research organizations and industry can further accelerate the creation of new revenue streams through new innovations.

Skourides emphasized the important role of research organizations in Cyprus explaining that 23.4M has been allocated to Co-develop, and 12M to Research in enterprise to-date since 2021 explaining that an additional 9M Euro will be made available for both programs in 2025. The total spending for Collaboration & Knowledge transfer stands at

47.2M euro and will be distributed across ICT, Green transition, Energy, Shipping, Agrifood, Health, Advanced Materials, and Environment.

Concluding, Mr Skourides has emphasized the importance of Skills and infrastructure where amongst others, **9 small scale infrastructures** each amounting to 700k Euro per project have been funded, and shared that **5 large infrastructures** with funding up to 2.5M Euro per project have been contracted, citing the **Cyprus Space Research Center** recently announced by CSEO and also Agora 3.0 by German oncology center with partners details included in presentation. Mr. Skourides commitment to ensure that maximization of every investment is further confirmed by his decision to review on quarterly basis randomly all infrastructure investments also supporting their externalization efforts starting by reviewing the progress of the Cyprus space research project on July 30<sup>th</sup> 2024. In addition, Chief scientist Mr. Demetris Skourides has highlighted that the shift towards supporting younger researchers in specific program is expected to unlock trapped value across the R&I ecosystem, creating network effects, and re-iterated that the Research innovation foundation has also allocated more than 7.6M in 2024 to support senior researchers, and scientists who pursue research excellence. The chief scientist urged “the research organizations to amplify the message that every Researcher, Scientist and Innovator in Cyprus is important”, and both himself as Chief scientist and President of RIF board and the Deputy Ministry of Digital Policy, Innovation and Research Mr. Nicodemos Damianou are working tirelessly to create opportunities for growth.

The official presentation is available on the [Cyprus chief scientist website](#) here, and the videos of the Chief scientist and RIF mission in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese are available on [Cyprus Chief Scientist Youtube channel](#). [Portuguese, German, Hindi, Korean will follow in coming months](#)