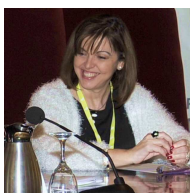


ANNEX 3: INTERVIEWS - Marina Villegas Gracia



Marina Villegas Gracia

General Director of Scientific and Technical Research Ministry of Economic Affairs and Competitiveness.

President of the Water JPI GB

1 – Societal Challenges, Industrial Leadership and Excellence in Science. Until recently, these issues were tackled almost independently, and difficulties in articulating industry-society-academia are well known around. How important are Joint Programming Initiatives, networking and interdisciplinary knowledge transfer to take RDI in Europe to a higher level?

Providing effective solutions to society through RDI and involving both academia and the industry requires setting ambitious global strategies based on the definition of real and urgent needs and challenges, as well as offering the most appropriate instruments to tackle them. In these days there is a clear need to develop business opportunities contributing to the economic sustainability in Europe. Ensuring seamless integration of the elements of the knowledge value chain (research, development and innovation) is critically important to overcome the economic crisis and to progress towards a sustainable economy. This requires serious effort on the part of Member states, through a comprehensive collaborative work involving all actors: stakeholders, civil society, policy makers, scientists, technologists and entrepreneurs. Joint Programming Initiatives have set out to make these connections among European countries and within the European countries.

2 – Our most valuable natural resource, Water, is pivotal to Europe. Given the number of organisations working towards similar goals, and the proliferation of initiatives regarding Water RDI, how close is Europe from having a clear, unified, and effective strategy for Water RDI (include strengths and weaknesses)?

There is still plenty of work to be done to coordinate the agendas and the activities of the European countries. The Water JPI has performed a strong contribution to this objective in quite a short time. For the first time in Europe, we have a Strategic Agenda and an Implementation Plan. These documents result from the consensus of almost ninety percent of the national public water funding... I believe that these documents underline that we are on the right track to a clear, unified and effective strategy. At the same time, this strategy needs to cover the specific needs of all partner Countries. The Water JPI can be proud of the bold commitment that took us to this point, and of how the European Water sector leads the world in research and innovation. However, stronger commitment will be required to attain the objectives of the Water JPI, established for 2020. Among them, end-user involvement and Alignment of National Programmes will require renovated efforts.

ANNEX 3: INTERVIEWS - Marina Villegas Gracia

3 – Please elaborate on Water JPI’s main achievement(s) up to date, including the contribution for the alignment of national water research programmes and policies, and new opportunities opened to the Water RDI community.

As previously discussed, the Water JPI community is very proud of its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA 1.0) and its Implementation Plan 2014-2016. Both documents were officially launched in October 2014. Additional key achievements include:

- The involvement of a critical mass of European RDI funders;
- The publication of our Pilot Call for proposals on Emerging Pollutants, and the evaluation and ranking of the proposals;
- The development of team spirit and cooperation habits among partners, which has led to the energetic development of tasks such as mapping RDI programmes, alignment of National programmes, design of cooperation activities outside Europe and dissemination.

4 – On the same topic, what do you consider as Water JPI’s challenges related to the convergence with H2020? What collaborative actions are foreseen in the future to foster synergies?

Cooperation with Horizon 2020 is critically important for all Joint Programming Initiatives. Since Horizon 2020 and National programmes perform similar activities, the JPI can play a key role in fostering synergies and avoiding the duplication of efforts. This cooperation is already resulting in a more comprehensive use of resources and in the implementation of more coherent research and innovation actions. The challenges identified by JPIs in their Strategic Agendas should be taken into account as an input to the Horizon 2020 biannual work programmes. The Water JPI has already produced a position paper in this sense, recommending ten topics for adoption of Horizon 2020 Societal Challenge 5. On the Other hand, Horizon 2020 has already published one topic for Coordination and Support Action and two topics for ERA-NET Cofund based on the SRIA of the Water JPI.

5 – Innovation plays an important role in economic growth, job creation and the improvement of the quality of life in Europe. In your opinion, what are the largest barriers that hinder innovation and technology/knowledge transfer in Europe?

In my view, innovation and knowledge transfer need to be firmly established in the European Research and Innovation system. Emphasis is needed on setting research results in value. This can critically contribute to growth and jobs. However, in the field of water it is also very important to contribute to develop more advanced policies protecting water quantity and quality, and controlling water related risks. In my responsibility as Director General for scientific and technological research, I promote knowledge flow from science to technology. The challenge remains to make technology work for the economy and the quality of life. An enabling policy framework for entrepreneurs and access to risk funding are critical factors for success.

ANNEX 3: INTERVIEWS - Marina Villegas Gracia

6 - How can the public and private sectors create a favorable environment for innovation in companies/enterprises?

I believe that there is not a single answer to this question, but rather a set of conditions. Some of them could be:

- Developing new policies in research at national level for fostering the collaboration between Academia and industry.
- Promoting the creation of spin-off companies from research results.
- Providing new, efficient, problem oriented RDI and instruments within the national Programmes.
- Providing sufficient resources for excellent researchers and innovators.
- Increasing the involvement of end-users, SMEs, and other stakeholders in the definition of national research programmes.

7 – How do you envisage the future of the Water JPI, regarding challenges, goals and outcomes?

We live days of celebration and the Water JPI, since we have recently launched our SRIA and Implementation Plan. I am positive that this initiative will continue evolving, and growing. The commitment of our partners is a clear sign of future success. The Water JPI will continue to set new objectives and strategies for achieving sustainable water systems in Europe, strengthening European leadership and competitiveness in the water sector and contributing to the alignment of the national and regional programmes on water research, innovation and development. I believe that by doing so, the Water JPI will perform a measurable contribution to its societal challenge.

31th October 2014