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**Intervento del
Prof. Juan Romo**

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e Presidente Young European Research Universities Network "YERUN"*

Signor Presidente della Repubblica, Magnifico Rettore dell'Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata e Magnifici Rettori delle altre università italiane, Signori Ministri, Autorità Istituzionali ed Accademiche, Gentili Ospiti, Cari Colleghi e Amici,

first of all, I would like to thank the Rector of Università degli Studi di Roma "Tor Vergata" for inviting me to participate in this event.

A great thinker and a great European has recently passed away: Zygmunt Bauman. I wish to pay a tribute to him with my first words here in Rome, cradle of European culture to which he contributed throughout his academic life. Bauman wrote: "The older you are, the better you know that however big the thoughts may seem, they will never be big enough to embrace (...) the bountiful prodigality of human experience".

His words emphasize the value of human life and human experience, and it is worth remembering it precisely here, in this Faculty of Humanities and Philosophy of Tor Vergata. At the same time, his words do not diminish the world of ideas. Nobody knows better than he does, that ideas are the engine that keeps society moving forward. For some, Europe is an idea; for others, it is a myth; for the universities that comprise YERUN, the Young European Research Universities Network, it is a reality embodied in our everyday work. But still, as Europeans, we are never satisfied with reality as it is.

The Spanish thinker, María Zambrano, used to say that Europe is a utopia, perhaps the last utopia we can feel proud of. For me, as Rector of the Universidad Carlos III

de Madrid, and as President of YERUN, utopia and reality go hand in hand in our daily work to strengthen cooperation amongst European universities, to develop together scientific research and to offer an excellent academic education to our European citizens and to international students.

These days, it is necessary to acknowledge that the European project is enduring hard times. The decision of the British people to leave the EU, the refugee crisis and the aftermath of the financial crisis are three of the events that make this evident.

Not only Europe, but the whole western world is undergoing difficulties these days. Some American academics say we live in a VUCA world. This recently coined acronym, VUCA, stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. We can say that we live in a VUCA Europe as well. The good news is that our institution, the University, is in a privileged position to face this world. The University is equipped to counteract volatility, with its solid foundations that go back more than nine centuries, when the first European university was established in Bologna, just four hundred kilometers from here. The University is the most comfortable place for uncertainty, since knowledge is by definition an adventurous journey to an unknown destination. The University is the place for complexity: scientists provide real breakthroughs in their fields of research precisely because they acknowledge the complexity of their topics and are able to manage it. Finally, the University and the academic community are happy dealing with ambiguity as well: to understand, to find meaning, to define; all of them verbs that are dear to the academic community.

Despite all the difficulties, Europe is the place where we all live together, united by our differences. In the same way, the institution of the University is the place where ideas coexist, ready to be challenged, rebutted or confirmed. Ready to be developed or disregarded, to be innovative and creative, to drive the research that will make our societies move forward and perform better. Albert Einstein said, “in moments of crisis, only imagination is more important than knowledge.” The University is the place where imagination and knowledge go together. Research and innovation are the crucial contribution of the University to society.

The need for the European project is stronger than ever before. However, Europe as an idea would not make sense if there were not actual and specific achievements. YERUN is one of these achievements and I must say I feel proud of the accomplishments we have made in these years. YERUN embodies our will to build the networks that strengthen European knowledge and innovation, in order to

provide our societies with more wealth, progress and wellbeing. There are no limits to our success as long as we reach the necessary critical mass to have our say in the global world. That is our task, and we are working hard at it.

In the coming years, many changes will affect the dynamics within our universities: more commitment and funding to innovation, stronger demands on the transversal and interdisciplinary education and skills of our graduates, and more internationalization and interconnections of research. It will be necessary as well to reinforce our communication, since our work must reach and permeate society. Many decisions about these topics are made in Brussels, where we have a voice in representing what our universities want and need in the future. YERUN members represent a participation of almost 4% of Horizon 2020 projects so far: almost 600 European projects are being implemented at the moment in YERUN. That experience allows us to position ourselves on key files, such as the future funding programme that will follow Horizon 2020. Negotiations about priorities, the funding allocation and conditions for participation will be debated within the next two years, and YERUN will work to have its members' objectives included.

Open Access, Open Data and Open Science are also relevant issues in Europe. YERUN has a representative at the High Level Group that is advising the Commissioner Carlos Moedas on these areas.

In addition to positioning on EU policy priorities, YERUN has a commitment to promote meaningful and engaging actions within the network in order to strengthen the capacities of members individually. In that sense, current actions are looking into the development of Joint Programmes and the organization of workshops in which our researchers will have the possibility to present their work and discover new areas for collaboration.

The 18 member universities of YERUN come together from 12 different countries to promote joint initiatives in areas of research, teaching and staff mobility. Our work is already yielding fruit, but there are many things to do ahead.

“Turn your wall into a step,” said German poet Rilke. We have turned this sentence into our motto. Let the boundaries between countries and universities become the steps that will lead our Network to make great contributions to Europe and to its citizens. And I would like to thank specially Rector Novelli and Università degli Studi di Roma “Tor Vergata” for your important contribution to our activity in YERUN.

Grazie per l'attenzione che mi avete prestato. Vorrei augurare a tutta la Comunità universitaria di "Tor Vergata" e al mio amico Rettore Giuseppe Novelli un anno pieno di successi professionali e di nuove iniziative e progetti da realizzare. Allo stesso modo vorrei indirizzare al Presidente Mattarella il mio più caloroso augurio di buon lavoro per l'adempimento dei Suoi elevati compiti istituzionali. Dall'impegno profuso da ciascuno di Voi nel proprio campo potranno discendere soltanto frutti positivi per il bene di tutti i cittadini italiani, per l'Europa e per chiunque ami la cultura e la conoscenza. Grazie ancora.