The Associação Cotec, the Fundación Cotec and the Fondazione Cotec were born with a common objective: to strengthen the innovation capacity of industrial systems of their respective Countries.

Portugal, Spain and Italy, though with different dynamics, are behind many countries in many of the parameters that characterise the competitive capacity of a national system of innovation. In the European picture, they are the rearguard in almost all of the indicators of industrial innovation and competitiveness. To these concerns, we must add those related to Europe as a whole, which is far behind its two traditional competitors, the USA and Japan. Moreover, on the horizon, there are the growing technological and industrial challenges of giants like China and India.

In these three Countries, where there is a majority of small and medium sized firms mainly operating in traditional low technology sectors, the introduction of the Euro and the parameters of Maastricht have made technological competition an unavoidable objective.

Given the difficult scenario that Italy, Spain and Portugal are facing there are some basic considerations to be made. They must identify the national priorities at a technological level in order to precisely direct their organisational efforts and financial resources. It is no longer possible to dissipate the meagre national and European resources in sectors with little industrial impact. To this end, the three countries must jointly direct their choices in the European context towards the areas of common technological interest.
The innovation capacity of a national system is characterised by the adequateness of a complete set of framework conditions, such as transport, telecommunications, energy, systems for protecting property rights, bankruptcy laws, and so on.

Spain, Portugal and Italy, which are already working to modernise their national systems of innovation, can find a common ground for cooperation both at the trilateral and at the European level, in order to strengthen these framework conditions. We can think, for example, of Mediterranean coordination of inter-modality in transport, or of the promotion, at the European level, of a new bankruptcy law - that are considered two crucial issues in the three Countries.

For some years now in Europe, we have been speaking of the European paradox. On one hand we have competitive research, on the other, we seem to lack adequate innovation capacity. From thorough analyses of the citation index, this consideration seems incorrect. European research, too, seems to have a basic weakness; this is even truer in Spain, Italy and Portugal. It has become urgent, therefore, to give greater support, and in a more selective manner, to research and to its transfer processes towards firms, by promoting forms of collaboration between the Universities and the firms of the three Countries.

Finally, the Mediterranean area for Italy, Spain and Portugal, is a difficult challenge, but also a great opportunity both from an economic and a political perspective. The three Countries should take advantage, in a coordinated way, of the strategic opportunities of industrial development and jointly develop initiatives for innovation and technology transfer on the southern part of the Mediterranean area.

These are at the premises on which the three COTECs will develop their future international activities.
As we can see in the articulation of the I Symposium on Innovation in Europe, there are three principal axes of the COTEC’s international cooperation: the joint analysis and proposals to be presented at the institution level of the European Union; the definition of thematic areas of common interest to the three countries to be brought up in the Community context; the development of projects of technological cooperation in the sectors of common interest for the productive structures of Spain and Portugal and Italy.

To this activity, in the future, we will have to add also that directed towards the southern shores of the Mediterranean, with the objective of anchoring those Countries more and more to Europe’s technological and industrial development.

This meeting today, we can say, represents the beginning of the active co-operation between the three COTECs at an international level. Each COTEC has its own objectives and methods of action in its own Country. Also, the governance of each COTEC is different. In some, there is only an industrial presence, in others there is a mix of industrial and of public and institutional actors.

The documents we are presenting today, as I said before, are prototypes of the activities that we intend to perform in the future. The document on the objectives of Lisbon attempts to define the delays of Europe and specifically of our three Countries, and what possible measures could be adopted to make up some of the lost ground, at least for the most important objectives for industrial competitiveness in Southern Europe.

Analyses of the European innovation policy proposals will be one of the principal joint activities of the three COTECs. Some of the topics that will be discussed in the future will be, among others, the bankruptcy law, intellectual property rights regulations and innovative finance.
The document on the 7th Framework Program is another type of international activity. It contains a joint work of the three COTECs to delineate a common position of the three Countries on the architecture, but also on the thematic priorities of the 7th Framework Program. The purpose is to contribute to direct the choices on the allocation of the E.U. resources towards technological and innovation sectors that are priorities for our three Countries.

The third initiative that has been presented today is the one on technological agreements. To make the collaboration between the three countries more effective, the three COTECs have worked to facilitate the realization of cooperation agreements in three very different sectors: inter-modality, production systems, and the detection of natural catastrophes.

This has brought us this morning to the signing of three Memoranda of Understanding by companies and research bodies involved in these three initiatives. But this is only the beginning of an activity that sees the three COTECs working to promote agreements of technological innovation in other sectors, including building, culture, energy, tourism, agriculture and forestry.

Taken altogether, the aim of these initiatives is to gradually build up that Mediterranean policy of innovation, recently announced by the Honorary President of COTEC Italia, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. In our opinion, such policy is strongly needed in our three Countries.