



Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas (FORTH)

PRESS RELEASE

Heraklion, March 30, 2022

Professor Nektarios Tavernarakis elected Chair of the European Institute of Innovation & Technology

As announced today in Brussels, **Nektarios Tavernarakis**, Chairman of the Board of Directors at the Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas (FORTH), and Professor at the Medical School of the University of Crete, **was unanimously elected Chair of the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT)**. Nektarios Tavernarakis will be in charge of EIT activities, assuming duties on July 2022. He has been a Member of the EIT Governing Board (GB) since 2020, after being appointed by the European Commission, following a highly competitive evaluation of the scientific and managerial achievements of candidates, from all European countries.

Nektarios Tavernarakis is the first Greek to have been elected Member and Chair of EIT's Governing Board, following an outstanding scientific and managerial career, with substantial contributions and important initiatives towards promoting innovation. This significant distinction comes as recognition of the scientific quality and the highly competitive research conducted at FORTH and the University of Crete.

To fulfil its mandate, the Governing Board brings together 15 high calibre Members balancing extensive expertise in the fields of higher education, research, innovation and entrepreneurship. The GB is entrusted with steering the activities of the EIT, for the selection, designation and evaluation of the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), and for all other strategic decisions. It is independent and autonomous in its decision-making. The EIT Governing Board is chaired by the EIT Chair, who is assisted by two GB Members that comprise the EIT Executive Committee. Executive Committee Members are elected by the EIT Governing Board and they are also Members of the EIT GB, which oversees the implementation of the EIT strategy and work programme, established by the GB.

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology is a pioneering initiative of the European Commission that drives innovation across Europe, by integrating the business, education and research sectors, towards developing solutions to pressing global challenges. The Institute fosters innovation, through a successful model that promotes the development of dynamic, long-term European partnerships – the EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) – where businesses, education and research combine forces to deliver solutions to pressing global challenges. There are currently 8 KICs that aim to tackle climate change, sustainable energy, digital technologies, healthy living and active ageing, raw materials, food for future, smart, green urban mobility and manufacturing. The EIT is also launching two new KICs, one in the field of the Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries, and the other on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems. EIT's budget in the framework of the "Horizon Europe" programme exceeds 2.9 billion €.

With Europe's largest innovation network of more than 200 EIT Innovation Hubs, gathering over 2.900 partners, the EIT endows innovators the means they need to succeed. EIT currently comprises 8 KICs and offers a wide range of activities, to help aspiring innovators turn their best ideas into products, services, jobs and growth, including education programmes, start-up and acceleration support, as well as,

innovation-driven research projects. The EIT Community has brought over 1.400 new products and services to the market, trained thousands of entrepreneurs and has supported over 3.800 ventures that have attracted 3.9 billion € in external investment.

Commenting on his appointment, Nektarios Tavernarakis said: *“I am deeply honoured to have been unanimously elected and to be appointed as Chair of the Governing Board of the EIT, Europe’s largest and most experienced innovation network-! Since I have joined the Governing Board, I have been exposed to a thriving ecosystem, made up of Europe’s brightest innovators, students, and partners working together to co-create the future of Europe. There is no doubt that innovation plays a central role in overcoming some of the greatest challenges we face. In these unprecedented times, I look forward to further strengthen European innovation capacity, expanding our ecosystem and increasing our impact, working together and cooperating as Europe, to drive the prosperity and richness of our continent”.*

Following the decision, Gioia Ghezzi added: *‘I am thrilled to see Nektarios Tavernarakis take on the role as the EIT’s next Chairperson. There is no doubt that with his experience and commitment towards Europe’s innovation ecosystem, he will continue to raise the EIT’s ambition and power Europe’s digital and green transition”.*

Short Biography

Nektarios Tavernarakis is a Professor of Molecular Systems Biology at the Medical School of the University of Crete, in Heraklion, Greece. He is also the Chairman of the Board of Directors at the Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas (FORTH), and Research Director at the Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology of FORTH, where he is heading the Neurogenetics and Ageing laboratory. He studied Biology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and holds a PhD degree in Molecular Genetics from the University of Crete. His research focuses on the molecular mechanisms of necrotic cell death and neurodegeneration, the interplay between cellular metabolism and ageing, and the mechanisms of sensory transduction and integration by the nervous system. His extensive executive experience includes service as Chairman of FORTH, which is the largest and most prominent Research Organization of Greece, Director of FORTH’s Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology and Director of the Graduate Program on Bioinformatics, at the Medical School of the University of Crete. He is also Vice President of the Scientific Council of the European Research Council (ERC), and elected President of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Governing Board and Executive Committee. He is a Member of Academia Europaea, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the German National Academy of Sciences (Leopoldina), the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO), the Academy of Athens, and the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. He is the recipient of several notable scientific prizes and awards, including two ERC Advanced Investigator Grants, an ERC Proof of Concept Grant, the EMBO Young Investigator award, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel research award, the Helmholtz International Fellow Award, the Bodossaki Foundation Scientific Prize for Medicine and Biology, the Empeirikeion Foundation Academic Excellence Prize, and the BioMedical Research Award of the Academy of Athens.

Relevant links:

<https://tavernarakislab.gr/>

<https://eit.europa.eu/news-events/news/nektarios-tavernarakis-appointed-eit-governing-board-chair>