

Czech Presidency conference
Researchers in Europe without Barriers
Prague, Tuesday April 28, 2009

A European strategy for human resources dedicated to research
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Mister Prime Minister,
Mister Commissioner,
Mister President of the Academy of sciences of the Czech Republic
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like first to thank the Czech Presidency for its invitation to open this conference. It is for me a great honour to represent Valérie Pécresse, French Minister for higher education and research, requested at the conference of the Bologna process which stands today and tomorrow in Belgium.

The invitation you made her illustrates the willing of the trio, made of Sweden, France and the Czech Republic, to work together closely in order to set up a fruitful continuity among the different works of our European Presidencies.

As you know, this conference follows the « Young researchers in Europe » conference, hold last November in Rennes during the French Presidency and also the publication by the European Commission of the Green paper on “the new perspectives of the European research area”.

Both conference and paper put forward the question of the international dimension of the researchers’ job market. Indeed, it is a real challenge because we have to question the attractiveness of our European research area, but also a great opportunity as globalisation simplifies the knowledge circulation.

For researchers, as for all professionals, mobility is always inspiring.

Scientific excellence and network development depend on mobile researchers.

For the country of origin, an international experience for its researchers is the occasion to build scientific cooperation networks. The stronger would be the links between the mobile researcher and the country of origin, the more profitable would be the knowledge sharing for the latter.

Researchers' mobility is not a « one way » mobility, in which the country of origin would be the loser, and the country of arrival would be the winner. Let's place ourselves into another perspective where everyone wins, where mobility is made as a necessary tool for knowledge circulation and profitability to research and innovation national systems.

European cooperation has already been engaged for a more transparent mobility and we can build on them.

The purpose of the French conference « Young researchers in Europe » was to come up with concrete actions to set up the commitment expressed in the communication of the European Commission on “better careers and more mobility: a European partnership for researchers”.

This Partnership between the Commission and Member States focuses on 4 key fields of action: 1. systematically publish and open vacant positions in research organisations to European researchers; 2. improve work and employment conditions to make scientific careers more attractive; 3. meet the needs of mobile researchers with regard to social security and supplementary pension schemes; 4. and finally, make it possible for researchers to acquire the skills needed to transform knowledge into concrete results, especially by strengthening the links between the university and the corporate world.

Launched at the French conference as a new tool for the implementation of this Partnership, the “European human resources strategy for researchers”, incorporating the principles of the C&C,

made a new step in a continuous process for progress.

I would like to go deeper on some today's conference issues.

First, the importance of the doctoral period.

The doctoral programme is the moment when a set of skills is acquired like project management, intellectual property, or information competences. These skills need more publicity and more recognition because they directly influence the employability of doctors outside academia.

The employers which value these skills clearly show that they are aware of the careers' complexity and diversity.

Second point, we need to increase the visibility of mobility opportunities for researchers. The European Commission set up Euraxess that each one of us has to become familiar with.

Euraxess is a tool that will help make recruitments more open and transparent.

Identify the key factors of success of international recruitment was a task for the participants at the Rennes conference. Institutions' attractiveness to researchers appears to result from a combination of factors such as: 1/ the research team and environment's quality, 2/ the services available in the institution, 3/ the coaching for immigration and integration issues, 4/ the support for families and accommodation, 5/ the attractiveness of the urban environment such as infrastructures, as you can see elements going well beyond the sole salary level.

Also arose in the debate the crucial issue of social security coordination in Europe and this leads us to the need for a better use of this coordination and the diffusion of it.

We are naturally driven to question the relevancy of a status for the European researcher, a status that would guarantee real social recognition and satisfactory living conditions, in the following of the Competitiveness Council of September 2008.

The French Presidency has missioned Ministers Gago and Biltgen to think over all these issues. The outcomes of this mission show

promising perspectives for a first common road map on status.

The goal to promote the doctoral programme outside academia is reaffirmed, as the necessity to assure within the European research area a work contract with adequate salary for all researchers, as well as a social coverage during the whole career.

To sum up this first part I would recall that a researcher's career depends on a true recognition since its early stage, the doctoral period, the non-permanent positions abroad, and the use of specific tools to open recruitments for doctoral candidates as for senior researchers.

The building of the ERA urges social security coordination and full social coverage for researchers, and not penalize mobility.

To be a researcher in Europe is not just a geographical issue, it should mean more. Thinking of a status for researchers in Europe meets this demand. Not a status in a regulatory approach but a set of conditions assuring researchers a better social and material recognition.

This status should thereby be the result of common actions from State Members and the European Commission.

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I would like now to share with you some innovations decided in France in the recent period in terms of employment strategy.

When State Members innovations meet a European strategy, it gives a clear signal that the European Partnership is in motion.

One of our main reforms was to put an end to practices named as « liberalities ». It consisted, for decades, in directly funding early stage researchers without a work contract and therefore without full social coverage.

This type of funding, of common use in foundations, certainly started with good intentions. Nevertheless this system rapidly showed its negative side effects.

The lack of a proper work contract is a real denial of the professionalism of young researchers and this is not the message we want to send to those who wish to enter scientific careers.

So, my Ministry invested in supporting the transition from “liberalities” to work contracts.

We also prepared for the recruitment of doctoral candidates by public institutions, a new contract -simple, flexible and with all the guarantees of a public work contract. It will be named “doctoral contract”, will last three years and will be common to universities and research institutions.

The salary will be negotiable over a starting amount but without any above limit and a specific bonus will be offered to doctoral candidates having value-added activities such as teaching or consultancy in industry or administrations.

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These measures on the early stage of research careers would not make any sense if we do not reconsider the whole career path. That is the policy, the “career plan”, we proposed to our researchers’ community.

Four principles underpin this re-building. 1/ First of all, we need to go from “universal” monolithic paths to the recognition of individual choices and competences. 2/ Professional commitment and excellence should be rewarded. 3/ All the human resources actions have to be lead in complete transparency. 4/ And last, peer to peer and independent assessment has to be the base of the strategies.

These principles structure a general policy, for all personnel in higher education and research with better wages for teachers-researchers starting with the doctoral period and better transparency tools for an improved recruitment.

I will not go in details on the « career plan » but these measures show our willingness to build a strong link between science and

society, and to place in the centre the women and men who contribute to its development.

Finally, and we know it from the fresh experience of our Presidency, organising such a conference is specially demanding. I wish therefore to warmly thank the organisation team which made it possible for us to gather and work together.

I wish you fruitful debate in the workshops.