

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



Commissioner Janez Potočnik

Researchers in Europe without barriers

Speech at Presidency conference

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to speak here today about admittedly one of my favourite topics over the past years: researchers. I would like to thank the Czech Presidency and the Czech Academy of Sciences for organising this conference. Today's presence of Prime Minister Topolánek underscores the Czech Presidency's priority on researchers' mobility and careers. And it could not fit in better with the overall Presidency motto "Europe without Barriers".

It is indeed important now to keep up the momentum on improving researchers' mobility and career options within the European Research Area. It is a logical follow-up on the achievements of the French EU Presidency, during which the Council of Ministers endorsed the European Partnership for Researchers, as part of a package of five ERA-initiatives launched in 2008.

I have said it before: where "conclusions" normally come at the end of a process, last year's Council conclusions on these ERA-initiatives signify **a new beginning**. Framed in the Ljubljana Process for research, also launched in 2008, they imply **a shift to a higher gear**. To bring about the European Research Area faster and in full, in partnership with Member States.

A European Research Area which has become a core part of the European project. The **5th anniversary** this very week of EU enlargement, in which amongst others the Czech Republic and my home country, Slovenia, joined, reminds us once more of the essential *acquis* of European integration. Through the European Union we have realised peace, security and prosperity on the basis of interdependence. It is too easy to forget the progress we have made over the last 50 years by removing borders. According to estimates, thanks to the Single Market in

2006 alone, Europe was richer by 210 billion Euro - 500 Euro per citizen in one year.

The **financial and economic crisis** however is currently putting the Union to the test. For some people it is tempting to retreat behind national frontiers. But history shows that **protectionism does not bring protection**. It only brings more hardship and conflict. It is often said that history repeats itself. If we learn from history and open up to the future we can break this vicious circle.

On the importance of research it is fair to say that we have learned valuable lessons in recent years. Imagine a crisis as the current one occurring two or three decades ago. Research budgets would have been drastically cut on the basis of the then prevailing perception that science, like arts, is a kind of luxury that society can only afford in times of prosperity.

But in the current downturn **EU leaders have called for stepping up and improving the quality of investment in knowledge, research and education**. That is new. But it is not only politicians saying this. Unlike in previous economic downturns, today also the business sector acknowledges that keeping up such investments is crucial to economic recovery and sustained prosperity.

The EU has decided on a **knowledge-based economy** that responds to societal challenges as a model for **sustained development** - an economy in which economic and societal value is derived from producing, diffusing and exploiting knowledge.

The European Research Area that we are building is an integral component of this agenda of **structural reform**. Our goal is to create a genuine **European single market for research**. A market where knowledge and technology can move freely

across frontiers, in the same way as goods, people, services and capital do. This freedom, the EU's **fifth freedom**, is our preferred alternative to research nationalism.

Ladies and gentlemen, I said that I would talk about **researchers** today. Researchers are key to the realisation of the 5th freedom. We cannot build the European Research Area and create excellent European research without excellent researchers! And those excellent researchers need to be able to move to the right place and the right research opportunities – where their talents can be best used – to be able to make their full contribution to European Science. Researchers are the "**human face**" of the European Research Area.

We have come to realise that it is not at all self-evident that Europe will in the years ahead be able to attract and keep enough researchers that are well trained and highly mobile. We have made the analysis in our proposal for the European Partnership for Researchers. Still the EU produces more science and engineering graduates than the US and Japan combined. But this excellent human potential is not being fully used and researchers make up a much lower share of the workforce in the EU than in those countries.

Many European graduates and doctorate holders either move away from research careers or pursue research in countries where they find better opportunities – mainly in the US. This global competition to train, attract and retain the best scientific talent will only get tougher and expand also into Asia.

Equally so, we need to be concerned about **demographic developments**. In some sectors and places in Europe these have already led to shortages of researchers. With a declining interest in research of young people it doesn't take rocket science to see that the situation is not getting better by itself.

Actually it is all about **sustained attractiveness**. Attractiveness of the research profession is multiple faceted. It is not only about excellent research infrastructures and an intellectually stimulating environment. It is not only about opening up recruitment and bringing true merit-based competition to attract the best researchers from wherever they come.

It is equally so about addressing other quite basic things, such as decent employment and working conditions throughout a researchers' career. What we see in some countries and institutions is that young researchers are discriminated against other professions. Early stage researchers are often offered precarious, short-term contracts, even without basic social security, until far after their doctorate. How can we expect to attract bright, highly educated young people into research like that?

When researchers want to be mobile we see that there are many everyday problems in such fields as **social security and transferability of pension rights**. **We are not asking for a special treatment for researchers**. But what we would like to see is that **the implementation arrangements are better geared to the specific mobility patterns of researchers**.

And then what about **training**? Of course we need the best scientific training for the best talents to work at the frontiers of knowledge. However, we need not only to make sure that they are equipped with sound academic knowledge, but also with the skills that will enable them to function in and contribute to a modern knowledge-based economy. This is what industry has been asking for and what industry needs in times of economic recovery.

So that is the "why?" and the "what?" We are here today mainly to discuss the "**How?**". How to address these issues to decisively enhance Europe's attractiveness for researchers in the years ahead, in order to raise Europe's research performance?

We have the **political commitment**. Earlier this year, the European Council confirmed a commitment that Member States and the EU shall remove barriers to the free movement of knowledge. By enhancing the cross-border mobility of researchers. And by making the labour market for European researchers more open and competitive, providing better career structures, transparency and family-friendliness.

We have a **framework for common action** in the form of the European Partnership for Researchers between Member States and the Commission. This Partnership recognises that many of the issues to be addressed are within the realm of the EU Member States. Member States are supposed to develop or intensify actions at national and regional level on the four key areas of action identified within the Partnership.

At European level we expect Member States to actively share and discuss their national actions and by doing so benefit from mutual learning and take the opportunity to develop common guidelines on how to address certain issues. The ERA Steering Group on Human Resources and Mobility has started its work on this last month.

As a member of the Partnership the Commission will continue to fully deploy the existing Community instruments, both in terms of legal and funding provisions, for instance the People Programme of FP7. The Marie Curie Actions have a tradition in supporting researchers' mobility and careers across Europe. New actions such as

COFUND in that frame help national programmes for researchers to become more trans-nationally focussed.

The benefits of the partnership will include:

- greater autonomy for research institutions to hire the best people from where ever they come;
- full recognition of researchers' qualifications from other institutions and countries;
- all publicly funded researchers' positions to be openly advertised online;
- greater portability of individual grants awarded by national funding agencies and Community research programmes;
- better career development opportunities for early-stage researchers including regular evaluation and more autonomy;
- more flexible contracts for senior and end-of career researchers;
- more women on selection and funding bodies;
- systematic adoption of policies to promote better work-life balance;
- better training and better links between academia and industry to improve researchers' employability and ability to turn research into results.

Ladies and gentlemen, our partnership for researchers has been much discussed – and there is broad agreement that it is the right way forward. Today is an opportunity for policy makers and researchers to discuss together how best to implement it.

At today's conference we hope to learn how Member States are dealing with the challenges of the Partnership and what their plans and actions are.

But above all this conference will hopefully prove important for what other stakeholders at national and European level expect from and can contribute to the implementation of the Partnership.

The **involvement of stakeholders** such as research institutions, including universities, is very important to make the Partnership a success. Many of the issues addressed in the frame of the researchers' Partnership are directly linked for instance to the modernisation agenda of universities.

But also national research funding organisations and of course researchers themselves have an important role to play.

I hope that in the next day and a half it will be confirmed that a lot of action is already ongoing. And that based on this the actions in the frame of the Partnership can be further reinforced and accelerated.

It is up to each and every actor in research to help and make a reality of the European Research Area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I already mentioned at the beginning of my speech, a few decades ago Europe was demolished and Europeans were desperate for reconstruction and reconciliation. The European Union has brought lasting peace, stability, security, the promise of better prosperity, and a better life. The "raison d'être" for European cooperation was at that time more than obvious. And it still remains... even if we sometimes take those achievements for granted... which is obviously wrong.

The fact is that Europe has changed since then. It is a good place to live, and many are wondering why we should still continue to strengthen our cooperation. But if Europe has changed, the rest of world has done the same, one could say in a very dramatic way, especially in the last two decades. We are more interconnected and more interdependent. Developing countries, like China and India, are catching up fast, the world is getting more multi-polar. Many of the challenges we are facing together, like climate change, future energy supply, potential pandemics, shortage of food and water, security... are increasingly getting more and more global. Competition is getting even fiercer. In a way one can say that the world in which we live is more fragile than ever. I am convinced that two concepts will determine our common future life: sustainability and global governance. Sustainability in the widest sense of its meaning - if we have learned anything from the current financial and economic crisis, it is that even profits should be sustainable. The need for global governance is of course a consequence of the fact that the world has turned into a global mutually interdependent village. Our individual and collective responsibility has substantially increased.

The world needs a responsible Europe, a Europe which is able to speak with one voice, a Europe which can take a global leading role when needed, like for example on climate change. But not only the world, we, as Europeans, need a stronger Europe, a Europe capable of dealing with the changed reality in which we live... a Europe capable of facing increased competition...

But also a Europe capable of removing barriers to the free movement of researchers and research... a Europe capable of free movement of knowledge, if you want. That is why we are here today, that is why **you** are here today, that is what we need to built together: a Europe without barriers.

I thank you for your attention!