

SPEAKING POINTS

**Concluding session Czech Presidency Conference
"Researchers in Europe without Barriers"**

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"The European Partnership for Researchers: from framework to action"

Introduction

- We are nearing the end of a rich conference programme. My thanks to the Czech Presidency for putting the researchers' issues so high on its agenda and for such a well organised event.
- I would like to focus my remarks on three aspects: on the importance of the conference it self; on some of the key features of the European Partnership for Researchers and the need for concerted actions by all the parties concerned, and on the next steps.

1. The importance of the conference itself

- The European Partnership for Researchers and the other four initiatives proposed by the Commission and endorsed by the Council in 2008 were preceded by a wide consultation of stakeholder on the European Research Area. This conference is however the first event bringing together the various stakeholders concerned to discuss the Partnership for Researchers. Not only public authorities at national and European level, but also researchers, employers and funders are here today.
- This is important in itself. It is vital that the various stakeholders concerned meet and discuss with a European perspective the issues at hand and the actions to be taken. What are their views on the priorities and actions to help make progress? How do they intend to contribute to improve Europe's eco-system for researchers? On which issues do they need to work together? The bottom-line is that the success of the Partnership for Researchers depends on the commitment and concerted actions of all stakeholders concerned.

2. The importance of the European Partnership for Researchers

- Now why is the European Partnership for Researchers so important? The main challenge is to raise Europe's research performance as a key driver for its competitiveness and growth. And this can not be achieved without more and highly skilled researchers.
- Investment in education, research and innovation is a political priority. Even more so in the current economic downturn. This was confirmed by Heads of States in the December European Council. Experience from previous recessions has shown that countries that continued to invest and invested more, recovered faster and more strongly. Unlike in previous economic slowdowns, we also see that many firms are seeking to preserve their investments in research and innovation. Creating appropriate conditions to increase the number, quality and mobility of researchers will contribute to a sustainable recovery.
- There is an urgency to work on this together and intensify our actions across Europe. We have just to look at the strong and rising global competition to attract the best

research talents. Also the demographic trend in Europe is worrying. The retirement rates of researchers are already posing problems in some sectors and regions.

- The European Partnership for Researchers is now largely recognised as the common European framework and timeframe that should guide the coherent development of actions to make Europe a more attractive place for researchers.
- One of the main features of the Partnership is its balanced approach to both researchers' mobility and career prospects. Tackling both aspects simultaneously is necessary to put an end to "brain drain", which is a concern of many Member States. More mobility is vital for a more efficient flow of knowledge between institutions, between academia and industry and across borders. But it is only if we make researchers' careers more attractive that we will be able to establish a beneficial "brain circulation" and ensure an adequate supply of researchers. Each European country will benefit from a fully functional internal market for researchers if it takes the appropriate actions to improve its own situation.

3. Moving way forward, the next steps

- Finally, I would like to turn to my third remark. How do we move from this common framework into action? We have identified the problems and also the objectives and actions to address them. But the situation varies from country to country. So, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each country has to define its own action plan - that is a coherent set of actions – building on actions already taken, strengthening and complementing them with new ones, based on an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and involving the stakeholders concerned.
- Many of the actions are clearly the responsibility of national authorities. This concerns in particular the legal obstacles to the open and competitive recruitment of researchers and the issues related to social security and supplementary pension rights.
- This conference has clearly shown that public authorities in many countries are taking up their responsibilities in the partnership. They are reviewing their situation, consulting

the parties concerned, defining their priorities and preparing and even implementing new actions along the lines defined in the common framework.

- We have also seen yesterday and today that employers, researchers and funders are mobilising themselves and willing to take actions in the areas of their responsibilities to move the partnership forward.
- The reforms undertaken in many countries to increase autonomy and accountability of public research organisations, in particular of universities, is creating a dynamic of change and a favourable context for new concrete actions by the institutions on issues such as opening recruitment, improving working and employment conditions and developing doctoral programmes better fit for purpose.
- While such actions are within the responsibilities of universities, public authorities should encourage them through appropriate incentives including financial ones. They should also promote a coherent approach between institutions. Institutions should in turn take full advantage

of their increased autonomy to define and implement human resources strategies that will enable them to cooperate and compete more and better within as well as across national borders.

- This brings me to the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment. Nearly a thousand of institutions have endorsed these principles and the number is continuing to grow. This is positive but it is not enough. It is necessary to know what actions are actually taken by the endorsing institutions to implement the principles. This is why we have launched with the former French Presidency a simple, voluntary self-assessment mechanism. Through this mechanism institutions can make public their plan to implement the Charter and Code principles, as part of their "human resources strategy". I want to take this occasion to advertise this mechanism and encourage all research institutions, in particular those that have already endorsed the Charter and Code principles, to engage in this process.

Conclusion

- Ladies and Gentlemen, this conference has achieved its purpose as a platform bringing together the various stakeholders to exchange views, share experiences and start to work together on actions to make Europe a more attractive place for researchers.
- It has contributed to build momentum to move forward the implementation of the Partnership for researchers. As I said, we know the problems and the answers. Now is the time to act.
- Actual progress towards our common objectives will depend on the sustained commitment of all the parties concerned. Marginal improvement will not be sufficient. The ambition of our actions must be commensurate with the challenges.
- Europe will not be able to strengthen its research performance if it cannot offer potential researchers attractive careers without barriers to mobility.

- As national research systems are increasingly interconnected and researchers increasingly mobile all countries will benefit from acting simultaneously and in a coherent way. The cost of inaction will be high for countries that will fail to act.
- The Steering Group on Human Resources and Mobility has been tasked by the Council to drive the implementation of the Partnership. This Group, which is composed of representatives from Member States, the Commission and Associated Countries, is now starting its work. Its activities include the identification of good practices and indicators to monitor progress and, where appropriate, the development of guidelines on issues of common interest. The plan is also to produce by the end of the year an overview of actions taken or planned at national level. And in 2010, the Commission will produce a report that assesses the progress made and identifies areas for further actions.
- The Group is aware of the importance of involving the various stakeholder groups concerned and intends to associate them where necessary. I encourage representatives

of stakeholders, where this is not the case yet, to take an active role in the preparation of the action plans in their respective countries.

- On the side the Commission, we are fully committed to the implementation of the Partnership by supporting the work of the steering group and through the relevant activities of the Framework Programme.

Thank you for your attention.