

Janez POTOČNIK
Member of European Commission

Address at

**“Crossing Borders-Research Funding in the Heart of
Europe”**

**Conference organised by the Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft**

European Parliament 28 February 2005

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort
Velja govornjena beseda*

Prof. Winnacker,
Prof. Niebler,
Honourable Members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me. It is both an honour and privilege that I can address you today, and I see it as another proof of our fruitful cooperation. This cooperation has been very valuable for me, as well as for the colleagues in my services. The DFG is the largest research council of this type in Europe and one of the major funding agencies for basic research in the world. I wish to thank you in particular for your strong support to the creation of the European Research Council. I trust that I can continue to count on your expertise and determination in pursuing this ambitious and indispensable goal. I should say at this stage that the Commission is also thankful and fortunate to be able to count on the continuous support of the European Heads of Research Councils (EUROHORCs) in developing the concept of an ERC.

Allow me to use this opportunity to tell you more about the proposal we are preparing for the next Framework programme and what we wish to achieve with it.

But before I say **how**, I think it is appropriate first to say **why**.

The discussion on 7th Framework programme is important not just for research. It is a debate about nothing less than Europe's credibility to reach the Lisbon objectives, a debate which is taking place at a crucial point of time, only several weeks before Europe will hopefully agree on its financial means for the next decade. The discussion about the new financial perspectives is the moment of truth and the question of sufficient funding for European research is an essential part of it.

Why? As Professor Winnacker has already stated today – and I warmly thank him for his words of support - because research is about knowledge and knowledge is a truly European strength in global competition.

Let me explain:

Some of our trading partners are competing with primary resources, which we do not have. Some compete with cheap labour, which we do not want. Some compete on the back of their environment, which we cannot accept. The only way for Europe and European enterprises to build sustainable leadership is to fully exploit the knowledge triangle: the creation, transmission and use of knowledge, through research, education and training and innovation.

My strong conviction is that we will achieve competitiveness and leadership for European enterprises on global markets, only if we rapidly put Europe in the lead as an economy and a society of knowledge. We are strong in knowledge. But we can become much stronger still: if we pool our efforts in an intelligent way; if we give full emphasis to excellence, and if we use the full research potential throughout the EU, old, new and future. And this is what I want the future research programme to stand for.

Knowledge does not only make business more competitive: it also brings continuous progress to society. Progress in fields such as health, preservation of the environment, sustainable energy supply, rests largely on the progress of knowledge.

[But knowing that so many among you have dedicated your professional life to generation and dissemination of knowledge, I should probably better stop here. If I cannot convince you about the importance of knowledge, I would probably need to start looking for a new job.]

In this context of knowledge for growth, the 7th Framework Programme, which we are finalising in these days, will be a key component.

My idea for it is to give a more powerful instrument to leverage knowledge for growth, with more flexible, simple and easily applicable procedures. The FP7 needs to be the Programme of the Growth for Jobs strategy.

Next Framework Programme

Let me now turn to **how**.

The duration of the programme will be 7 years as is the case of the next financial perspective. This allows us more stability but also flexibility. Both are needed.

As you know, we have proposed doubling the **annual** budget.

The doubling of funds is necessary in order to show our commitment towards the implementation of the renewed Lisbon agenda and to the Barcelona 3 % target on R&D spending. In addition to this, doubling is necessary because of the new activities that will be proposed, such as European Research Council or the European technology initiatives, to name just a few of them. We need doubling to be able to implement these activities without prejudice to the existing ones which will continue also in the future. An additional reason for doubling is the oversubscription in some areas which forces us to reject a number of excellent proposals just because we lack financial resources. And finally, we should not forget that the cost of research itself is also growing.

As regards the structure, there will be more emphasis on themes and less on instruments. Cooperation projects, former collaborative research, will be more focused on industry needs and therefore growth supportive. There would be a strong part on “ideas” with actions concerning “frontier research” and ERC. I will get back to this later on. The “people” part of the FP7 will strengthen the existing mobility actions under Marie Curie and the “capacities” part will deal with the issues of infrastructures, SMEs, regions, research potential, science and society and international cooperation.

In order to provide for smooth implementation of the programme, an important simplification and rationalisation will have to be provided throughout the legislative part as well as in the life-cycle of the projects. I am aware that this will be one of the most difficult tasks but it is worth we do our best to achieve progress in this field.

As regards the management of the funds that are to double, this will of course also be a major challenge. But with simplification and rationalisation on one hand and modernised management as well as externalisation of some of the activities, such as ERC, SMEs and the mobility actions, we will do everything to cope with this challenge.

The links to other programmes that will also implement the renewed Lisbon agenda are essential. This concerns in particular the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme and the structural funds operations. Only through synergies between all these programmes can we achieve a coherent framework for an effective implementation of the renewed Lisbon strategy.

Finally, just a few words on the component which is very important for you.

It has become increasingly obvious that we need to support the best researchers with the most exciting ideas with a mechanism at European level. If we want to unlock the potential of big ideas we must support to “investigator-driven” research. As you know, we currently do not have such a mechanism at European level, although it recently became widely accepted that we need it. We need it if we want to introduce flexibility in reactions to new developments in various fields of research. We need it to introduce competition at European level, which will in turn reinforce European research and thus also our knowledge base.

This is to be accomplished with creation of the European Research Council (ERC). I can confirm that our proposal will take into account the main principles listed by Professor Winnacker. Perhaps I should try to underline two fundamental principles for which I intend to fight for vigorously - autonomy and scientific excellence. Regardless of the constraint that current legal framework might place on us in our concrete proposal for its structure; I wish to assure you of my determination to guarantee the autonomy. In turn, autonomy will be best guarantor for scientific excellence for being sole criterion for selection of proposed projects.

I have to admit to you – I am getting very excited about the ERC. It may well prove to become not only a mechanism for attracting and supporting the very best researchers to Europe and strengthening our knowledge base but also one of most important tools in our quest for global competitiveness.

Let me conclude by saying that I intend to do my best to implement the vision I have just described - because I believe it is the right one. I am asking for your support and I trust I will receive it.

Thank you very much.

* * *