



**Commissioner Janez POTOČNIK**

*The Future of Science & Technology in Europe*  
*High Level Conference*

*Lisbon*

*8 October 2007*

Minister Gago, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Today is a highlight in the calendar for the Portuguese Presidency. I trust it will also be a milestone in the development of the European Research Area.

On many occasions over many years, Minister Gago has shown his dedication to the cause of research in Europe. Today's conference is further proof of his commitment. My special thanks go to him for having taken the initiative to gather this impressive assembly of Europe's research and innovation community.

I am conscious of the many tens of thousands of researchers that you represent, support, manage and report on, in disciplines that cover an enormous range of scientific endeavour.

Today's assembly is a good illustration of the European Research Area at work. You are the European Research Area. You contribute to the vigour, growth and success of European research – as individuals, as organisations and institutes, as commercial companies, as governments and as communicators of science and innovation.

My role and that of my Commission colleagues at this conference will be to listen to you.

I have launched a debate on the future of research in Europe because I see every day how urgent and essential it is for Europe to get the most out of its research system.

We have made progress since 2000 in building ERA. But the pace is far too slow. If we look at the speed with which the world is changing, we can only conclude that our progress is far too slow and too timid.

The brightest 10% of the combined populations of China and India are equivalent to half the total population of the EU. The rapid development and integration of these emerging nations into the global economy will intensify the competition, but also the cooperation, between scientists, engineers, industrialists and entrepreneurs.

Last Friday, we published the 2007 edition of our annual scoreboard of company R&D investment. EU-based companies have increased their R&D investment by 7,4% over the previous year. Worldwide corporate R&D investment has meanwhile grown by 10%.

Our society is now clearly confronted with challenges that no single country, industrial sector or scientific discipline can tackle. Energy and climate change is but one such formidable challenge.

The only possible answer to sustaining our prosperity and preserve our planet is the knowledge-based society. A society that thrives on education, research and innovation.

That, in a simple expression, is for me the essence of the Lisbon strategy – the strategy which was launched in this city 7 years ago.

The European Research Area is one pillar of Europe's Lisbon ambition; its realisation is indispensable and urgent.

From the impressive number and quality of the contributions we have received so far, it is clear that you share the ambition and the sense of urgency.

If I may quote from the contribution of the Confederation of British Industry: (quote) "The EU must have vision and ambition. The EU should focus

on using its resources to create a critical mass of activity around core themes, which will allow it to compete on the international stage with Japan, the USA, China and many others." (unquote)

The least I can say is that the debate on the future of European research is timely and relevant.

Over the next three days, we can further make this debate productive - together.

A European Research Area cannot be but an area of excellence. Excellence in science, excellence in the way we use the results of science and excellence in the development and implementation of science policy. Excellence in science policy is my objective, and I'm sure also that of all of you, for this conference.

What are my expectations for this conference?

I do not expect that we agree on a Brussels-controlled central planning system for optimising research in Europe.

What I do expect from this conference is:

- A shared and ambitious vision for ERA;
- A strong sense of co-ownership of ERA by all concerned;
- An idea of possible broad orientations for future action; and
- A momentum to move forward and to deliver.

I detect from the public consultation some forms of apprehension, which in my view are understandable, but unjustified. I hope that this conference can help us overcome these.

- The EU controls 5% of public R&D spending - and yet, there is concern that it coordinates too much.

- 3% of European R&D workers are mobile across borders – and yet, there is fear for "cultural homogenisation".

We should not step back from taking the plunge for fear of cold water.

Before concluding, let me react to some of the messages that are coming out loud and clear from the public consultation.

Firstly, it is not the Commission that will build the ERA, neither by law nor by wishful thinking.

The Commission will have to reflect carefully on its role. It is clear to me that if we do too little, not much will happen. But if we do too much, not much will happen either.



I take the opportunity to send a clear message: the Commission cannot and would not wish to, impose the ERA. A genuine European Research Area will only be created if all researchers, their institutions and companies, the Member States and regions as well as the Commission work together in partnership, with each accepting their responsibility for making it happen.

Secondly, there is no appetite in the Commission, or elsewhere, for top-down coordination.

The way ahead is, first and foremost, to define and implement modalities that stimulate and reward bottom-up initiatives for more competition and more cooperation. As an economist, I strongly believe in incentives.

I would like to quote here from the joint contribution we received from the EUROHORCS and the European Science Foundation: (quote) "Fragmentation is not so

much an issue of too little coordination, but mainly a consequence of limited competition within protected national research areas."

Thirdly, we have to focus on the European added value. One of the strongest benefits that I believe the European dimension can bring is more competition between researchers to be better and more cooperation between research funders to make Europe stronger in research.

Allow me to quote Professor Walter Kröll from DLR: "We need more money for research and better research for the money."

Fourthly, research is not the same as innovation, but research and innovation are intimately linked and must reinforce each other. The European Commission is implementing a broad-based innovation strategy to improve the framework conditions for innovation. But

building a world-leading research base has to be part of that strategy.

Increasingly, businesses thrive in an environment of "open innovation", where connections with each other and with public research institutions are vital to explore ideas and develop products more effectively than would be the case alone. The links between an excellent public research base and business are key to an innovation ecosystem.

Fifthly, and lastly, we should acknowledge that the European Research Area is very diverse. There are many different actors and different situations across countries. There are many different kinds of research performing organisations. There are different ways of funding research. All have their role to play and their contribution to make.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe can be the best – but we have not at all reached our potential.

Several EU Member States are among the global leaders in innovation. 11 Member States are among the top 20, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. And the EU is home to many world-beating companies.

I strongly believe that ALL will benefit from a well-conceived and dynamic European Research Area.

The Green Paper has concentrated on essential "factors of productivity" in research: researchers and their organisations, infrastructures, funding, knowledge sharing and international cooperation.

This conference gives us a golden opportunity to debate how we can make the best of these factors to move forward together. The Commission's intention is to come forward with proposals for action as from the beginning of 2008.

Research and innovation are high on Europe's political agenda. But they equally are on the agenda of our competitors.

We need sustained effort over a long time. That is why I want research and innovation to remain high on the agenda for a long time.

This will only be the case if we make quicker and better progress in realising the European Research Area so that we become again champions in scientific publications, in Nobel prizes, in business R&D investment, in the market introduction of new technologies, in the growth of new, high-tech companies.

Frankly, we have no choice. I don't think we can afford to meet again in 5 years time and to make the same analysis as today. The world is not and will not be waiting for us.

Knowledge economy and knowledge society are no abstract terms which can be abused by anybody who wants to please and pretend that he or she understands and cares for the future.

No, they are very concrete. They are asking for a constant and consistent long term support to knowledge, to education, to research and development, to innovation.

They are asking for implementation of that support in practice, even when it is tempting to protect so often mentioned national, regional, local or even individual institutional interests.

They are asking for honesty, for more competition, for more cooperation, for more coordination, for attractive conditions, for more funding, and above all for more freedom, true freedom of movement of knowledge.

I wish you an excellent and enjoyable conference.

Thank you for your attention.