

Janez Potocnik, European Commissioner for Science and Research

Video Speech, Vienna, 14 September 2006

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY!)

Madam Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I sincerely regret not to be able to be with you today to exchange experiences and to share visions on the contribution European universities of technology can make for the implementation of the Lisbon agenda and the evolution of a European Knowledge, Research and Innovation Area.

- Allow me to start with a question so as to put this discussion into the broader European policy context: What is the Knowledge Society and Economy in Europe?
- It is **part and parcel of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs**, a strategy on which we base actions and initiatives to master in a sustainable way the dynamics of global competition.
- **We need actions** that will allow us **to make Europe** a more attractive place to invest and work in, and to create more and better jobs.
- Much of the **Lisbon Strategy** focuses on what Europe can and should do best: **foster excellent research, encourage high standards of education and make room for creativity and innovation.**
- This means that Europe's future as a **knowledge economy** is obviously closely **linked to the future** we foresee for our **universities.**
- European universities, - and when I talk about universities obviously the European Technology Universities are part of them - have enormous potential.

They are the main sources of knowledge and knowledge is an increasingly critical factor in shaping European's economy.

- But this potential goes **untapped because of various stringencies and hindrances**. If Europe wants to free up the substantial reservoir of knowledge and talent immediate, in-depth and coordinated change is required: from the way in which systems are regulated and managed, to the ways in which universities are governed and funded.
- Following the European Council's invitation at Hampton Court last November, the **Commission has adopted in May a Communication to drive forward the modernisation of Europe's universities**, to increase their contribution to Europe's drive for more growth and more jobs.
- This Communication is a **joint initiative by myself and by Commissioner Figel**. It covers **all** activities of Europe's universities, from their delivery of education and, their research activities, through to their potential as drivers of innovation.
- While the main actors are obviously situated at national and regional levels or in the universities themselves, the EU's role here is to complement **national actions** and reinforce them **at European level**.
- The European Commission delivers on this role, both **through its funding programmes and by giving policy impulses**.
- On **funding programmes** relevant for universities, I should of course mention the Seventh Framework Programme for research (FP7), and obviously the new series of Education Programmes and to a certain extent also the **Competitiveness and Innovation Programme, CIP**.

- The **Structural Funds** need to be explored by Member States and universities as possible funding sources developing closer synergies and interaction between education, research and innovation, and to build or consolidate research capacities at local and regional level.
- As Commissioner for research, I would like to concentrate briefly on the next **Framework Programme for research, FP7**. From 2007 onwards we will be able to draw on a research budget that will grow substantially in the years to come.
- Finalising the decisions on the necessary legislation and implementation modalities for FP7 is a priority, in order to be able to launch the first calls for proposals still before the end of this year.
- What makes FP7 so important is that in many ways it corrects market failures in research throughout Europe. As such it brings **dynamism into regional and national research** and it fosters and spreads excellence through competition at European level.
- It also **combats fragmentation and exerts a structuring influence** on the research fabric in Member States by stimulating trans-national cooperation. Pooling of competences and resources increases the likelihood of breakthroughs. It is as simple as that.
- The specific programmes and various instruments of the 7th Framework Programme will therefore enable and stimulate universities to **strengthen** their role in and their **contribution to European research**. At the same time it is designed to **have a significant impact on the quality of research in universities**.

- Ladies and gentlemen, in my view **research should be a key mission of universities, both for knowledge production and for training purposes, as part of a coherent institutional strategy.** The issue of how to respond effectively to the increasing complexity and pace of knowledge development and application is crucial. Universities' role in an increasingly “scientific” and “technological” society is essential.
- One of the premises on which FP7 is based is that its **success depends on its capacity to attract and reward the best university-based research** and to mobilise universities behind achieving the general EU objectives of leveraging knowledge for growth in a European research area.
- The more universities adopt a **coherent approach** to participation in FP7's different activities, reflecting universities' interests **as corporate-like entities** rather than **organisations of loosely-connected research groups**, the greater FP7's leverage effect, and its benefits for universities, will be.
- **This implies strategic choices and the willingness to conduct internal reforms.** I am – however – convinced that these will allow universities to make their full contribution to Europe's social and economic goals, and come in support of, not in contradiction to the other roles of universities in a culturally and linguistically diverse Europe.