

Commissioner Janez Potočnik – Informal Council, Prague, 4 May 2009

Speaking Points – first session "Connected and functioning Knowledge Triangle"

DRAFT

- First I want to thank the Czech Presidency for organising this timely debate on the "knowledge triangle" and its implications for the European Research Area and the Ljubljana Process.
- But before going concretely into issues around today's topic, I wish to make one step back and remind you of the larger context of economic and financial crisis we are living today. On this point, I wish to share with you the following, and I quote:
- "At such a difficult moment, there are those who say we cannot afford to invest in science. That support for research is somehow a luxury at a moment defined by necessities. I fundamentally disagree; science is more essential for our prosperity, our security, our health, our environment, and our quality of life than it has ever been."
- Can you guess whose words are these? Mine? It could well be so, as I made the same call on several occasions since the outburst of the crisis. Well, in fact these are US President's Obama words from one week ago, while he was addressing the National Academy of Science.
- But the additional call I wish to make here today is that besides increased investment in research, we would also need to improve our investments in knowledge and education.
- As you know, since the start of my mandate I have been a strong advocate of this integrated approach to policy-making, linking research, education and innovation closely together.
- When thinking about the knowledge triangle, we should focus first and foremost on how it is working in practice. I was pleased to see that this is precisely the approach proposed by the CZ Presidency in its background paper and questions.
- This is the type of questions that we should ask and address. For example:
 - Can European companies, notably SMEs, easily cooperate and use the knowledge developed in universities and public research bodies across Europe, which is vital for them to innovate and be competitive in a world of open innovation?
 - Can European Universities smoothly apply for competitive external funding across Europe, on which they increasingly depend for their long-term financial sustainability?

- Do the education and lifelong training of researchers and of "knowledge workers" more generally, match sufficiently the requirements of world-class research and the needs of innovative businesses?
- On each of these three questions, unfortunately, the answer is "no", the situation is still far from what business, universities and researchers would need.
- This is why the Commission is taking initiatives on these three issues: to facilitate knowledge transfer between public research and the private sector, to make rules for competitive external funding of research more uniform across Europe, and to enhance the education and training of researchers, notably at PhD level.
- I take these examples for three reasons: first, because they are of utmost importance for all the actors of research and innovation on the ground. Secondly, because each of them involves the three sides of the "knowledge triangle": education, research and innovation. And thirdly because, like many issues in this knowledge triangle, they raise important questions of governance.
- One such question is the cooperation between government services in charge of research, education and innovation respectively. This in my view is not the most difficult question, even though the issue is complex. Administrations and governments are organised in many different ways across the Member States and at the EU level (Commission, Parliament and Council) and there are equally many ways in which bridges can be built between the three sides of the triangle. I don't think that we should look for harmonising these structures – but instead exploit the diversity by identifying good practice. The matter is not where the borders are set between departments. It is rather a question of whether practical arrangements are in place to foster dialogue and effective cooperation. This question goes in fact beyond the knowledge triangle, since many other policy areas should be involved, for example, to address properly "grand challenges" such as energy and climate change or to implement lead market initiatives effectively.
- A second, more delicate question is raised by the fact that competence for these issues is shared between the regional, national and EU levels, often with the centre of gravity much closer to the regional and national levels than to the EU, in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity. But, at the same time, we all recognise the need to cooperate and to ensure consistency and inter-operability between our systems and instruments. The "fifth freedom" of movement of knowledge cannot be established otherwise. And our instruments, such as the Framework Programme, need to better support our goal of realising the ERA and addressing the needs of our society. This is an issue which is raised in the FP7 progress report, which was adopted by the Commission last Wednesday, and which we will discuss in more detail in our next formal meeting.
- Therefore we need to establish pragmatic arrangements for joint governance, of course on a voluntary basis. On the issues which I mentioned, the CREST group on knowledge transfer is one such arrangement, as well as the steering group on human resources and mobility.

- But a very important and difficult question lies elsewhere. As these issues are of great importance to the actors of education, research and innovation, we must make sure that they are actively involved at all stages of policy-making, from the analysis and diagnosis of the problems to the design of solutions and to their implementation and assessment. Again I was pleased to see that Minister Liška's third question focused precisely on the involvement of stakeholders in the R&D policy-making process.
- To some extent, we are trying to do this. Most if not all our policy initiatives are preceded by extensive public consultations. We are also increasingly involving stakeholders in implementation. For example, on the issue of external funding of research, I have asked my services to provide the forum to bring together funders, universities, and national authorities to explore this. We have also set up important structures to engage stakeholders in a number of thematic areas, with the European Technology Platforms and more recently and ambitiously, with the European Energy Research Alliance. And Joint Programming is another process in which stakeholders will be invited to contribute to the development of joint visions and strategic agendas for addressing large societal challenges.
- And of course, at our level today we will be able to discuss with the chairs of EuroHores and the European Universities Association and with the representative of BusinessEurope, which is a most welcome initiative of the Czech Presidency.
- But we need still to involve the stakeholders and actors of the European Research Area in a more systematic and structured manner, in particular in the further development of the Ljubljana Process.
- As you recall, when the Council set the main principles of the Ljubljana Process one year ago, it defined it as, I quote, a process "of enhanced governance based on a long-term vision on ERA developed in partnership by Member States and the Commission with broad support from stakeholders and citizens".
- We have succeeded in developing and agreeing the long-term vision of ERA under the French Presidency. Now we are getting organised for implementation under the Czech Presidency, and we are about to reflect thoroughly under the SE Presidency on how to enhance governance.
- My plea today is that we bring the involvement of stakeholders and citizens to the forefront of our reflections on governance and implementation.
- As stated in the Ljubljana Process Council conclusions, the process should involve, I quote again, "all Member States and associated countries including regional authorities, as well as stakeholders such as universities and research organisations, civil society and business which should be actively engaged in ERA governance". We will need an active engagement of stakeholders in the governance if we want them to support us in realising the ERA vision.
- I don't mean to prejudge on the discussions on governance which we will have under the Swedish Presidency. Also I am making no specific suggestions on how our

governance should evolve to involve stakeholders and citizens. I only wish to highlight the importance of this involvement, because speaking about the "knowledge triangle" means in fact speaking about them.

- We have to admit that the European Research Area is not yet a reality for most actors, stakeholders and citizens, in the sense that most of them do not even know about it. Even in national administrations, ERA is still mainly a matter for the specialised EU Affairs departments. As for stakeholders and civil society, ERA "exists" mainly for the specialised European interest groups representing them. It has not yet come to the attention, not to mention the active involvement, of most of the non-specialist actors beyond.
- Changing this is, I believe, one of the keys to make ERA a success and to achieve our vision. This requires a new approach to communicating about ERA, not as one-way communication but as a continuous dialogue, involving all actors concerned:
 - Of course, governments, administrations and Parliaments at all levels – and I mean not just EU-affairs specialists but all departments in your ministries;
 - Equally the stakeholders: researchers, research centres, universities, business, research funders;
 - And finally the citizens and civil society.
- Allow me to borrow a comparison from the world of the Internet. The difference between ERA governance as we practice it today and how it should be done in future, is similar to the difference between the traditional Internet Websites, which offer services to relatively passive users, and the new interactive services of what is known as "Internet 2.0", such as blogs and Wikis like Wikipedia, where all users are invited to contribute actively.
- In a word, our objective should be to move from "ERA 1.0", which is an ERA owned by specialist administrations, towards "ERA 2.0" which will be actively owned and developed by all the actors concerned.
- This necessitates appropriate communication and governance instruments and services, which would require thorough reflection during the next Presidency.
- However, I believe that already now, during the Czech Presidency, we should give a strong signal to stakeholders and citizens that ERA will be developed for them and with them.
- If you share my views, this message – involving stakeholders and civil society, moving towards "ERA 2.0" – should become an important priority in the future development of ERA.
- I look forward now to hearing the views of stakeholders and Ministers on this model for taking forward the development of ERA.