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## **Sustainability: we can't build it alone**

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

Conference "Sustainable Neighbourhood – from Lisbon to Leipzig through Research"

**Leipzig, 8 May 2007**

Dear Minister President,

Dear Ministers, State Secretary,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a pleasure to be here today. I would like to congratulate the German Presidency on organising this timely event.

Today's meeting comes exactly two months after the EU's Spring Summit, led by Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel. EU leaders focused heavily on the issue of sustainability and set out ambitious renewable energy targets.

That was a recognition that not only do we have to reform for tomorrow's Europe, but we also have to ensure that we still have a Europe tomorrow. While the EU's goals are more jobs and growth, we should remember that these should be achieved with environmental protection, not instead of it. Even more environmental protection should be seen as a business opportunity.

And that, in a way, is my message today. Everything we face is interconnected. The world is now interconnected more than it has ever been. For example, look at the Internet: 17% of the world is now online, a growth of over 200% in the last seven years.

This development is happening at an unprecedented speed. In August 1996, there were just over 340,000 websites online. By August last year, that figure had risen to over 92 million.

And these interconnections cover the whole world. Most Internet users in are in Asia, with Europe second. And while Africa has the lowest level, it also has the fastest growth of users, at over 600%.

What does this illustrate? The Internet is just one measure of today's links. I could have mentioned air travel, mobile communications and even banking systems. They all connect us around the world – more quickly and over greater distances.

Sustainability is all about connections. For example:

- We cannot talk about environmental sustainability without considering energy.
- We cannot reform energy without looking at transport and industry.
- We cannot make changes to transport and industry without considering the effects on jobs and growth. And so on.

If the issues and challenges for sustainability are interconnected, our response must be too. We can no longer pretend that it is more important which institution, which discipline, which sector, or even which country finds solutions. Research is internationalised and so must be its answers.

Research has played a central role in the developments that I have already mentioned. But how can research help maintain sustainable development? And how does the EU fit in this international approach to sustainability?

Here, I would like to stick to what I know best – which is the EU's R&D efforts. Specifically, I'd like to focus on the new EU R&D Framework Programme, FP7, and what it is doing to maintain sustainability. FP7 will fund research in sustainability in a variety of areas.

FP7 reflects our joined up approach to sustainability. It seeks an international, cooperative, and public/private effort to ensure that Europe makes the most of its abilities. The clues are in its programme's names.

The Cooperation programme is FP7's largest – with 60% of the total budget. It clearly states that its *"overarching aim is to contribute to sustainable development"*.

Let me give you a few concrete examples of how it will do this:

- In the *"Food, agriculture and fisheries, and biotechnology"* programme, FP7 will fund research which enhances the sustainability of agricultural, aquaculture and fisheries production - providing results for safer, healthier and higher quality food.
- In the *"Energy"* programme, research across the board will focus on increased sustainability – in other words lower dependence on imported fuels, a diverse mix of energy sources, and increased energy efficiency.
- In the *"Environment"* programme, research will help our understanding of interaction between climate, ecosystems and human activities. It will also help develop technologies, tools and services which address global environmental issues.
- In the *"Transport"* programme, research will focus on developing safer, greener, and smarter transport.
- And in the *"Space"*, Global Monitoring for Environment and Security, or GMES, will provide a major boost sustainability research.

Other FP7 programmes will also contribute to sustainability. *Information and Communication Technologies* (ICTs) will monitor the quality of our environment and help increase our efficient use of natural resources. The same applies to *nanosciences, nanotechnologies, materials and new production technologies*, which will encourage smart growth, eco-innovation, and sustainable production.

But, as I already mentioned, we have to take an interconnected approach. That is why we are developing new ways of looking at solutions.

Take for example the new Joint Technology Initiatives, or JTIs. These build on the work of the European Technology Platforms and take public-private partnerships further forward. The JTIs will develop strategic agendas to improve performance in areas such as renewable energy like hydrogen and fuel cells. There is a plan to launch a JTI soon, looking into clean sky research.

One of the other novelties which brings together several elements is the new European Research Council. Previously researchers may have been restricted in applying for EU funds because either

- they didn't have a partner,
- their research was not covered in a Framework Programme agenda,
- or there wasn't sufficient funding available.

The European Research Council provides good answers to these problems.

The ERC has no pre-set agenda, no partners are needed and the funding will reach up to one billion euro a year. I am confident that frontier research looking at the challenges of sustainability will be funded under the ERC. Already the first ERC call for proposal has seen over 9,000 proposals submitted, many of which are interdisciplinary.

If I come back to what I mentioned in the beginning of my speech, I have to highlight the role of the international cooperation also in the context of FP7. International cooperation and horizontal cooperation across thematic priorities and disciplines has been reinforced and mainstreamed in FP7.

However the EU effort to ensure sustainability does not begin and end with FP7. Take for example the European Research Area.

The ERA is designed to improve conditions, facilities, opportunities and skills for the research community – all of these are vital to its sustainability. And it is also geared to making sure researchers in Europe have what they need – otherwise we may see that the research remains sustainable, but not in Europe.

The European Commission recently opened a public consultation on how to improve the European Research Area. I am looking forward to reading the feedback, and I encourage you all to take the opportunity to shape the future of European Research.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Seeing the world in an interconnected way is not new. In the 1930s, a book by Will Durant claimed that all philosophy from Plato through to Germany's Friedrich Nietzsche was interconnected.

More recently, in 1994 the Oscar-winning film 'Pulp Fiction' showed the world as a series of interrelated stories.

Our task is to make sure it's not just philosophers and film directors who see the world as interconnected. It is truer now than it has ever been.

Working in an interconnected way helps sustainability. In Europe in particular, we have to see that the challenges and opportunities which face us are too big for individual countries.

I really welcome and could not agree more with the principles laid down in the draft declaration that should be adopted at the end of this conference. As Commissioner for research, I am committed to ensure that EU research policy has a greater focus on sustainability and competitiveness, in the ways recognized in the draft declaration. And FP7 is really designed to go in this direction.

The challenges which face us are not science fiction. And we cannot tackle them with science fictions.

We need real cooperation for real problems. Only in that way can we ensure sustainability.

I will finish today by reminding you that one of the songs from the film Pulp Fiction was called simply 'Let's stay together'. I couldn't agree more. Enjoy the conference.

Thank you.