

**Opening Address**

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Research for Sustainability – Driver for Innovation**

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– Check against Delivery –

Parliament State Secretary,  
Ministers,  
Dear colleagues and guests,

I am honoured to be here and to speak to you, at the forum “Research for Sustainability – Driver for Innovation”. Allow me first to extend my appreciations to Minister Annette Schavan for the excellent initiative that will undoubtedly focus our efforts towards sustainable regional research cooperations. We all know that this is not a single act but a follow-up of a number of initiatives of our German colleagues, started in 2007 with the Forum “Neighbourhood for Sustainability – from Lisbon to Leipzig with Research”. And I am delighted that the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science took part in the “German-Bulgarian Conference on Research for Sustainability”, carried out in May 2008 as a followup activity.

“Why sustainability?” one may ask. Because sustainability is a transition: a transition from shortterm thinking to long-term vision, a transition from an outside-nature economy to an economy integrated with nature, a transition from seeing the environment as social and economic challenges which are competing each other to seeing the environment as interconnected social and economic challenges.

The European Union has identified sustainability issues as core elements of the overall improvement of the European quality of life. Built on the Goteborg agenda and further enriched with the Barcelona Summit, the EU sustainability strategy recognises the need to gradually change our current unsustainable consumption and production patterns and sets overall objectives and concrete actions for seven key priority challenges (e.g. climate change, clean energy, public health, conservation and management of natural resources, etc.). I can say that Bulgaria is fully aware of the significance of the “grand challenges” under the umbrella of sustainability research. Bulgaria is committed to fighting global warming by implementing the UN Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol. We agreed to reduce its emissions of Greenhouse Gases by 8% of the 1988 levels during the period of 2008 - 2012. The main priorities of the Bulgarian Energy Policy are perfectly in line with those of the EU’s Energy Policies for the development of market based energy markets, guaranteeing the security of energy supplies while protecting the environment and reducing the climate change factors. Bulgaria pursues a consistent policy aimed at encouraging the generation and consumption of

energy from renewable energy sources (RES). In the Energy Law the requirements of the EU Directive 2001/77 have been completely transposed and encourage mechanisms for all producers of electricity energy from RES.

Similar positive developments have been made for the transport sector in the area of environmentally- friendly technologies, sustainable production and consumption, conservation and management of natural resources, public health. These policies are reflected in the national programme documents under the structural funds and even more specifically in concrete operations under the operative programmes “Regional Development”, “Economy competitiveness development”, etc. Concerning the educational system in Bulgaria, based on the European experience the Education for Sustainable Development within the general educational system is planned and organised according to an integrative principle.

Last, but surely not least, the Bulgarian policy towards a development of research for sustainability has evolved in the past few years. By help of its national Science Fund the Ministry of Education and Science is supporting highly competitive and excellent research for the benefit of society and economic development on a project- and programme-based principle. High-priority research areas are public health; environment incl. climate change; energy, sustainable agriculture and socio-economic studies and analyses targeting the sustainable development of these sectors. Furthermore, we maintain a broad bilateral portfolio where the priority fields of research are environment, health, hazards, maritime sciences and energy.

There are several centers of excellence, supported via various instruments – European framework programmes on research, national research funds, regional programmes (e.g. stability pact) and industry – doing highly competitive research covering the key challenges of the EU sustainability strategy. For example the CERDECEN center of excellence, i.e. Center for Research and Design in Human Comfort, Energy and Environment. The research is addressed to energy efficient ventilation systems designed on the basis of integrated building performance simulation, the correct modelling of complex room air flow and many others. The center developed significantly during the past years, nowadays offering specialised services to the Bulgarian industry; organising targeted training courses, some of them supported under the Marie Curie Actions;

research activities in the areas of indoor environment; combustion modelling and other complex flows; consultancy; publishing and many others.

Another example is the center of excellence in the field of new and renewable energy sources. Its efforts are focused on several directions such as: new materials preparation and study, development of new technological processes for highly effective solar energy converters, photovoltaic and solar thermal system design. The “Environmental Technology and Management” Laboratory at the Technical University of Sofia, licensed by the National Ministry of Environment as an “EXPERT for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)” and specialised in the scientific engineering and management in the field of environmental technology and nature resources protection; environmental impact assessment for the realisation of projects for: industrial companies, petrol and gas stations, urban planning, touristic attractions and villages build in regions without constructing engineering infrastructure, etc.; environmental auditing; environmental analysis and other services.

I will now stop here with the positive developments. Being a policy-maker, and not the only one present at the Forum, I can admit that sustainability issues have become a very modern tendency, broadly exploited and in some cases used for political benefit rather than having the potential for real implementation. Concluding today I would like to sketch what I regard as some key aims that have not been realised so far. We lack a system of indicators for monitoring and impact assessment of sustainability issues in our research projects and programmes. We need a smart and effective use of resources. We have to prove that the funding money is spent in the best way in order to pool additional resources in areas of high national and European priority. Developing a reliable system of monitoring indicators will allow us to develop adequate instruments for the implementation of sustainability challenges including the shift from linear to systematic funding patterns. Sustainable development is an overarching priority of the EU and of many national governments. It means a responsible attitude towards the future of the next generations. It is about the continuous improvement of our quality of life, dynamic and competitive economic models, and a long-term commitment to meet the challenges of sustainability.

Once again I would like to thank our German colleagues for the initiative and the excellent organisation and I wish all of you constructive and beneficial debates.