

Opening Address

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on the occasion of the
5th BMBF Forum for Sustainability:
Research for Sustainability – Driver for Innovation

23 September 2008
Berlin

– Check against Delivery –

Parliament State Secretary,
Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here and have a chance to share a few comments, a few observations on this very important topic, the topic of sustainability. I would like to begin with our great appreciation to the organisers for this event, for this forum is bringing together not only researchers with passion and weight to solve very complex technical problems, but also people who are taking decisions: politicians, representatives of administration, on the regional and on the national level.

This conference on sustainability offers a very wide range of issues, a very wide range of topics. However, we have to realise that scientific solutions alone will not solve the problems which we are facing. And probably there is no debate on this issue anymore. We basically have to work together at the level of policy making, at the level of education, and then combine all that with very smart solutions, which we all are looking forward to develop in order to deliver a good quality of life for all of us.

Sustainability in the sense of sustaining the environment, the nature around us, the species, us human creatures and any other living creature is a very, very challenging issue. I would like to focus your attention on the decoration of this room. When I came here, I looked around and I looked at this wall behind us. It is preserving the past. I think it is done on purpose. We have natural ways to preserve things, to look after our treasures, but we are not as good with the rapid development of industry. It is uncontrolled.

The topic of this conference, the issue of sustainability, is not a local one. It is neither local for an individual country, nor local for Europe. More specifically, sustainability matters for the whole world. When you look at the industrial development in the emerging economies like China and India, the topic of sustainability is in their newspapers and in the media around the world. The sort of decisions which we have to take is whether we should preserve a little creature which is one millimetre long and we actually do not understand its role in the universe in contrast to building a highway to avoid pollution from a small pond. These are very important decisions, not necessarily scientific ones. We are facing fundamental problems. So I hope that this conference will bring all the smart thinking, all good will to really deliver at least a little step ahead.

This is the 12th European Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption and Production, so already eleven cities hosted this meeting with a similar research agenda or a similar agenda to deliver a progress. We are very slow, I have to admit. Let us look at the initiatives in Europe, especially at the European Institute of Technology. We just had the first meeting. One of the topics was where the money and funding will go to, and the issue of energy got top priority. Clean energy, renewable energy. This seems to be a very obvious decision. However, once we will have developed solutions, some of which are already in sight, the application of these solutions to society – which is very conservative in nature, as this wall indicates – is a major problem. Not for a scientist to solve, but for all of us.

I would like to mention that in Poland we are going to transform our funding and management of sciences. We are very proud of our fundamental achievements, in physics, in biology, in astronomy and mathematics. But in terms of problem based drivers for innovations, we still have a long way to go. So, our new policy will focus on much larger funds, explicitly to transfer scientific results into practice. Towards things which we can manage, we can trust to use and which would change the environment around us. We are also focusing on rapidly extending the collaborations not only with our neighbour countries but all around the world. We are planning to sign a declaration with the German Federal Minister of Education and Research on sustainability collaboration exactly on this topic.

When we look around the world and at really modern universities, we probably find departments which are completely new to us. These are interdisciplinary departments, sustainability research institutes, which only a few years back most likely would not have been established. Nowadays, they are acceptable, they are attracting the smartest students and they are really doing fantastic work. So what I am saying, basically, concerning the reform in Poland and our thinking, is that we should transfer fundamental research by picking out the best, applying it as quickly as possible and thus being competitive.

We have a lot of competitors not only among ourselves in Europe, but more important, in the rest of the world. Looking at publications, even in these multi-faceted topics, we find China being so dynamic at work. And that is great because it stimulates us as well. We cannot relax; we cannot sit back and wait that someone will do this for us. So we have to act together, work together, and I am sure that conferences like this eventually

may deliver and will deliver an understanding of the issues and classifications, a more systematic way to approach fundamental problems.

Let me comment on the renewable energies and clean energy. The solutions themselves – without immediate implementation, putting in practice and real testing – would not make any sense at all. In Poland we are very strong in the gasification of coal to reduce CO₂-emissions. We know the problem of CO₂-emissions. However, if we continue our work on this problem all by ourselves, a technology like that will take another many, many years before it really becomes applicable. We have to work together.

So, in conclusion, I think if we look at the broad scope of interests and at the title of sustainability, we talk about smart governments, we talk about psychology, we talk about education and on the last level technological innovations. Since when have we been talking about intelligent buildings? Whoever does a little bit of ICT-work will say, we have known this topic for maybe 15, 20 years. However, if we want to have more intelligence in terms of functionality, this will consume more energy which brings us back to the problem of the little creature which I mentioned before. So, it still is a long way to go, but I am absolutely confident that this conference will make a step ahead.

I would like to wish all participants great, creative, productive sessions and hopefully, this conference will sustain, will go on for years and may its results be visible. Thank you very much for the organisation one more time. Thank you very much for the invitation and the ability to speak to this forum. I would like to wish you all the best. Thank you.