

**Janez Potočnik**

European Commissioner for Science and Research

## **New ways to drive demand for new technologies**

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

Austrian Presidency Conference on European Technology Platforms

**Vienna, 4 May 2006**

Minister Bartenstein,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe faces many challenges to sustain its prosperity, its social values and its environment in the face of global competition. But it has a lot of potential and many opportunities are there to grasp. Technology platforms are one of the important comparative advantages we have at our disposal, to make the future of Europe happen in the way we want it. Let's not miss this opportunity. Let's explore how we can work together to turn knowledge into growth and create an innovative Europe.

That, in a nutshell, is my main message to you today.

Today's Presidency conference recognises the impact that European Technology Platforms have already had on the research landscape. Less than three years after stakeholders began coming together to consider setting up platforms, more than 450 people from some 35 European countries have gathered for this, the first Europe-wide Conference on technology platforms. It gives me real pleasure to be here with you and to address this opening session and I would like to thank the Austrian Presidency for this opportunity.

I assume that the Austrian presidency was inspired by one of its most distinguished artists, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, whose 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary we are celebrating. There is a striking resemblance between conducting a Mozart symphony and operating a technology platform: it requires a high degree of skilled orchestration to get all the different players performing in harmony. But we know the result is worth the effort.

### **European Technology Platforms: Contributing to a Dynamic, Knowledge-Based Economy**

There has been impressive progress since the first European Technology Platforms were proposed in 2002. Today there are 29 European Technology Platforms up and running and some additional ones are under consideration. I am delighted that all of these are represented here today. Over the last three years, European Technology Platforms have become a powerful and rallying force for reaching Europe's goal of becoming a dynamic knowledge-based economy. They are now recognised at the highest political level as a key component of the renewed Lisbon strategy for transforming knowledge into growth. Mr. Vittorio Prodi, a relentless supporter of technology platforms in the European Parliament, can testify to this on behalf of his assembly.

How have technology platforms achieved this?

Firstly, they unite all relevant stakeholders - industry, the research community, the financial world, regulators, end-users and wider social interests – around common objectives. They do so based on a vision of where they want to stand ten to fifteen years from now. Many platforms are already well advanced in translating their vision into an operational Strategic Research Agenda. Some have already started implementing it.

Secondly, Technology Platforms involve industry taking the lead role. This ensures that platforms are focussed on potential future markets for key technologies and provide the necessary impulse to realise Europe's potential in leading-edge technologies.

Thirdly, Technology Platforms play the European game. They span bridges between industry, the scientific community, the financial world, regulators and end-users with clear, win-win goals in mind for all across Europe. They help to overcome the fragmentation of research efforts in Europe and make viable projects that have greater impact and chances of success if developed at European level.

## **Implementation**

The majority of European Technology Platforms are now entering the phase of implementation. Their Strategic Research Agendas will be translated into concrete actions with concrete deliverables. The responsibility for achieving this lies in the first place with the platforms themselves. But, as I have said on several occasions, we, from the side of the Commission, are willing and eager to help where possible and appropriate.

Technology Platforms have already played a valuable role in helping to ensure that the priorities of the Framework Programme are tailored to be better able to meet industry's priorities. The Seventh Framework programme, particularly through the Cooperation programme, should provide the means to help implement Strategic Research Agendas where they have a genuinely European dimension and strong industrial relevance. The Cooperation programme remains the core programme of FP7. It will represent some 60% of the total budget, with the clear objective of helping Europe gain leadership in key areas of science and technology. I welcome the fact that the Austrian Presidency has reached a final agreement on the financial perspectives for the period 2007 to 2013 and that the European Parliament has succeeded in adding money for research and education.

The Seventh Framework Programme will have a total budget of € 54.5 billion in current prices over 7 years. This is not as high as I had hoped and wished when we formulated the Commission's original proposal for the Framework Programme last year. But it does represent an annual average increase of approximately 60% over the previous Programme. And now that we have an agreement on the budget, I believe it is important that we move on, make the best of what we have and focus on delivery. We can make a difference with the budget we have. We can succeed in leveraging knowledge for growth in a coherent European effort. But it will be even more important that we prioritise our resources carefully. For this, I look to European Technology Platforms as our partners in helping to ensure the necessary prioritisation of our activities under the Seventh Framework Programme. Their Strategic Research Agendas will provide important input to the preparation of the work programmes and they will be supported via the normal funding instruments.

## **Joint Technology Initiatives**

Some Research Agendas may achieve a scale and scope that calls for setting up a public – private partnership at European level. As you know, the Commission has identified six possible areas where such partnerships could be envisaged, in the form of Joint Technology Initiatives. Today, I would like to reiterate two points about Joint Technology Initiatives.

Firstly, such proposals will have to be justified individually to the Competitiveness Council, which will take the final decision on each of them, based on the merits of the case made by each. The Commission will, therefore, only propose Joint Technology Initiatives where the leaders of the industries involved have demonstrated the necessary long-term commitment to concrete deliverables in areas that will significantly enhance Europe's competitiveness.

Secondly, I wish to dispel any notion that Technology Platforms are only successful if they lead to a Joint Technology Initiative. All platforms that deliver effectively on their Strategic Research Agendas will be success stories. Success stories for Europe. But even more importantly, success stories for the participants.

### **Other Sources of Support**

As platforms move from definition to implementation, they would be ill-advised to look only at the Framework Programme. It is important that they exploit the full range of funding sources available - European and national, public and private. So I am encouraged to see that the Technology Platforms are beginning to play their part in relation to research programmes at national and regional levels. I welcome this development very warmly. I would also encourage Technology Platforms to capitalise on opportunities offered by the Structural Funds. The wide geographic coverage and broad stakeholder base of platforms makes them an appropriate vehicle for orienting the Structural Funds in support of research and innovation objectives. Another valuable source of finance could be the European Investment Bank. Under the Seventh Framework Programme, we envisage, together with the Bank, a novel Risk-Sharing Finance Facility to improve access to loans for European research actions. I know that the Bank is keen to work with Technology Platforms to identify possible projects for support under this risk-sharing finance facility or via other support facilities, in the field of risk capital for example.

### **Technology Platforms as Drivers of Demand for New Technologies**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In January this year, a High-Level Group chaired by former Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho delivered an exciting report on how to create an innovative Europe. This report points to Europe's innovation deficit, which prevents us from converting the outputs of our world-class research sector into innovative products and services. But it also points out that many of the elements required for innovation-friendly markets in Europe are already in place. According to the Aho Group, action is required in three areas to unlock Europe's innovation potential. We need harmonised regulations across Europe. We must use standards to drive high technical performance. And we must capitalise on public procurement to drive demand for innovative goods. All this in a coordinated effort with public support for Research and Development. Mr. Aho and his colleagues have recommended that we combine the various policy instruments that we have to help create – with business – lead markets for technology-intensive goods and services. In doing so, we can create market demand for innovation. Here again, I turn to technology platforms. You are the obvious people to turn to if we want to make this happen.

A quick scan of the European research landscape illustrates the point very well. Consider the importance of regulation, standards and public procurement in the construction sector – getting this right would open up innovative markets with huge opportunities, for example for low or zero energy buildings. Or how proper use of ICT could revolutionise healthcare – a clear example where technology and service innovation could improve prosperity and quality. Or again, how public procurement could accelerate the development of the hydrogen economy – imagine the impact if public transport systems decided to purchase hydrogen-powered buses, for example. These are just a few examples and I could cite a wide range of other areas with promising innovative markets, from environmental technologies to transport and logistics. What they all have in common is that these are areas where European Technology Platforms have developed Strategic Research Agendas. These research agendas could naturally evolve into European lead market agendas, developed by you with national authorities, associated to the technology platforms through “mirror groups”. We could reinforce these mirror groups for that purpose.

You are uniquely placed to identify where action is required. Your activities cover the complete value chain from knowledge production to its transformation into technologies and subsequently into new products, processes and services. Your industry leadership ensures a focus on potential future markets for key technologies.

I would like to invite all European Technology Platforms and the public authorities involved in them, to expand their role and to take a proactive approach to identifying what needs to be done, when and by whom in relation to regulation, standardisation and public procurement in their areas.

I have already asked my services to convene, in the coming weeks, a meeting of Technology Platform leaders and mirror group chairpersons to discuss how to bring this about. The Commission will then launch a wide consultation with a view to preparing a report to the European Council before the end of the year. Needless to say that your contribution to this consultation process will be vital.

### **Openness, Transparency and Non-Proliferation**

Before concluding, I would like to refer briefly to two factors that I believe are fundamental to the continued success of European Technology Platforms.

The first is openness and transparency. I acknowledge the determined efforts that most platforms have made in this regard. However, as Strategic Research Agendas begin to be implemented, the need for platforms to remain open to all stakeholders and transparent in their activities is more important than ever. “Closed shops’ of narrow groupings must be avoided at all cost.

The second factor is the importance of avoiding undue proliferation of European Technology Platforms. Platforms are intended to focus on key areas for European competitiveness. This means that there should not be an infinite number.

In this regard, I welcome the efforts of a growing number of platforms to develop horizontal links and networks of platforms in complementary areas. If these lead to mergers and the formation of stronger platforms linked more directly to Europe’s competitiveness objectives, it will be a positive development.

### **Conclusion**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am strongly convinced that technology platforms constitute a comparative advantage for Europe. I wanted to share this conviction with you and call on your cooperation. Technology platforms are the key to unlocking the innovation potential that Europe so badly needs. We have to work together so that the key fits in the right doors and that we give ample room to creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation. You may consider us – and I believe I can speak for Commission, Council and Parliament – as your allies in creating an innovative Europe. We can provide support to you and improve framework conditions for research and innovation – but without you, we will miss out on important opportunities for innovation, for growth – and ultimately, for improving quality of life in Europe.

I look forward to the outcome of your discussions over the next two days.

The conclusions you reach will provide valuable input to shaping the EU’s future research and innovation policy agenda.

Thank you for your attention.