

International conference

**ROLE OF BASIC RESEARCH IN THE PROCESS OF STRUCTURING ERA**

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Introductory Remarks by prof. Jiří Drahoš,

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Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure and honour to welcome you here on behalf of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. As you all certainly know, the construction of the European Research Area (ERA) began in 2000 and subsequently was established and strengthened by various tools, i.e., the Commission Green Paper on the ERA, or by Council conclusions which were recently endorsed by the Ljubljana process and followed by five identified initiatives for underpinning the ERA. Moreover, by the end of 2008 all these initiatives were widened by "Vision 2020 for the ERA" which underscored the importance of creating an area of freedom and exchange for researchers.

There are several issues and aspects of European science policy, and this conference aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding the new perspectives of the ERA. Discussions will be held on Vision 2020, coordination of research, innovation issues, etc.

Let me, however, briefly mention one specific issue of this ERA process. As you all know, the motto of the Czech EU Council Presidency is "Europe without barriers", aiming at the creation of a competitive and open Europe. This motto is, I believe, perfectly in line with the goal of developing a functional European Research Area.

Complying with this priority, during the period of the Presidency, the Academy of Sciences along with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, have concentrated mainly on two topics, namely, large research infrastructures and the mobility of young researchers.

As the construction and modernisation of research infrastructures is considered to be one of the main pillars of the ERA development, I should like to point out one aspect in this regard which is of paramount importance for an equal development of the EU and future success of the ERA process.

In my view, the development of a geographically balanced network of research infrastructures will play a key role in this process for, at least, three reasons:

First, only a regionally balanced network can have the potential to secure a balanced mobility of researchers among Member States. In the event of imbalance in terms of regional distribution of research infrastructures, the so-called "rich man effect" will cause a brain-drain from less advanced Member States with only negative consequences for the future development of the ERA.

Second, Europe must profit more from its diversity. In this respect, desirable concentration aimed at research infrastructures should respect the regional sustainability in the spirit of the Lisbon strategy. However, political intervention in this field should not hamper excellence, and they should not interfere, as well, with the determination of concrete fields of research.

Third, we very often forget that the best science is highly competitive. Therefore co-operation in science is frequently considered from a very pragmatic viewpoint, and it is aimed strictly at a purpose. As a result, co-operation as such cannot be considered as the goal of the ERA process.

In other words, the EU and its governing bodies should concentrate on priorities of a truly European dimension and influence coordination activities having a direct impact on the ERA. They should support positive changes leading towards an innovative environment with a high level of creativity in R&D. Moreover, it should be ensured that research infrastructures are allocated proportionally in all EU regions. The European Research Area must be established on the basis of equal partnership of all parties concerned, as the location of research infrastructures has an undisputable political dimension. Their concentration must not stimulate a profound structural divergence between the member countries. If a certain region practically lacks high technologies enabling top quality research, one can hardly expect that such a region will have the capacity for self-revitalization without political intervention. First-rate infrastructures, regardless of their allocation, will always attract first-rate scientists, and capital flows in the direction of an educated population and top quality R&D.

As far as the mobility of researchers is concerned, I am of the opinion that we should concentrate our effort on such instruments and measurement tools that would ensure a real exchange of experience since there is no direct relation between the mobility of researchers and the quality of their research work. It is also necessary to guarantee, on a general level, that measurements fostering mobility do not serve as a purposeless tool, stressing again the fact that mobility is not a goal, but a tool for the exchange of experience. Instruments supporting mobility of researchers around Europe should also be well advised not to cause a one-way, "Intra-European South-North, East-West brain-drain".

Finally, I should like to emphasize that equal distribution of research infrastructures and the presence of highly qualified researchers, who can move freely throughout Europe, are necessary prerequisites for the effectiveness of the ERA. In addition, all measures at all levels should strictly adhere to the principal of subsidiarity with a view to preserve the diversity of Europe, and in this way also the diversity of ideas.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the organizers of this conference who have managed to bring together participants from the European and international community of research stakeholders such as, research performing organizations, science foundations, the European Commission and other relevant policy makers.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, I wish you a truly productive conference and a pleasant stay in beautiful Prague.