Check against delivery!

Commissioner Janez POTOČNIK

Partnerships for Knowledge, Peace and Security

Thematic International Conference on Bio-, Nano- and Space Technologies

Ljubljana

10 March 2008

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here as host of the Jozef Stefan Institute, a stimulating environment to speak about international cooperation in science.

I would like to thank the Science and Technology Centre in Ukraine and the International Science and Technology Centre based in Moscow for initiating this conference.

I also welcome the presence of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU which is another sign of its commitment to the causes of research, innovation and international cooperation in science.

The European Union was born out of a concern to maintain peace, stability and security for its citizens. These goals will always be important for Europe. They explain the continued support of the EU for the ISTC and STCU science centres, together with our international partners from Canada, Japan and the United States.

The ISTC and STCU are good examples of how science brings people and countries together for the benefit of all.

Their mission continues. A recent independent evaluation initiated by the European Commission has confirmed the valuable role of the science centres in preventing the risks of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile technologies. The study also underlined the crucial role played by the researchers known as "former weapon scientists" in the prevention of those risks.

So the EU is glad to support these researchers who continue - sometimes under difficult conditions - to work for preventing risks. Since 1994, the EU has provided almost 25% of the funding for the projects managed by the STCU and 30% for the ISTC. Our total contribution to date exceeds €200 million.

After more than 10 years of operation, the science centres have become modern, proactive and service-oriented organisations. Not only have they given opportunities to former Soviet Union weapons scientists and engineers to redirect their talents to peaceful activities. They also have significantly contributed to basic and applied research and technology development of both national and international interest. In the process, they have become increasingly oriented to answering market needs and global challenges.

This evolution should improve the prospects for collaboration with researchers in the EU. So far, the level of collaboration of the EU Member States' organisations has been limited in contrast to our US counterparts. The US has established, through the Science Centres, strong links between American companies and research labs and the Eastern European and Central Asian institutes.

My wish is to see also our EU Member States using these Centres as assets in their international cooperation strategies. This would be fully coherent with our EU research strategy.

Indeed, international S&T cooperation is a priority in our strategy to realise a true European Research Area.

Our objective is to remove barriers to knowledge circulation in the European Union, but also to open this new free market for circulation of knowledge to the rest of the world. The new reality we are facing is global.

Globalisation has an impact not only on companies or mobility of people around the world, but it also has an impact on the challenges we are all confronted to: Shortage of water, global change, re-emerging diseases, disappearance of rare species. To address these challenges we need to intensify cooperation, exchange knowledge and search for innovative solutions on a global level.

I have introduced this global perspective in our main research funding programmes, known as the 7th Framework programme for research and development. With a budget of nearly € 55 billion for the years 2007-2013, it is much more open than the preceding programme.

I have ensured that cooperation with researchers from third countries is possible in all the thematic areas that the Framework Programme covers.

In recent years, the Russian Federation has been among the most successful third countries in European Union-funded research projects. At the same time, the participation of the Eastern European and Central Asian researchers in the Framework Programme is also increasing.

The philosophy of the Research Framework Programmes is competition and cooperation for excellence. I realise that there is a huge need in these countries for building research capacity. That is why I would like to draw your attention to the support offered for building capacity in research under the umbrella of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Turning to Central Asia, we meet a lot of enthusiasm there to participate in international research networks. That is very encouraging. The promotion of scientific cooperation is not only an aim of the EU's Strategy for Central Asia, it is also part and parcel of our Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with the individual nations in that region.

I will not tell you anything new by saying that the scientific cooperation between the EU and the Eastern European and Central Asian region holds strong potential in such areas as space, high energy physics, energy - especially in the field of nuclear fusion – biotechnologies and also nanotechnology.

I am convinced that the conference launched today will foster a dialogue between potential partners for identifying niches where cooperation would lead to innovative and excellent projects in these promising fields.

We don't start from scratch. Take space, for example. We have a long tradition of cooperation with Russia in the field of space. In the frame of the EU-Russia space dialogue, we are discussing the inclusion of Russian satellite capabilities to contribute to global Earth observations for the protection of environment and the management of climate change.

Cooperation in the satellite navigation sector (Galileo) is on the agenda and an EU project for installing a Soyuz launch pad at Kourou in French Guyana is under way.

But cooperation in this area is not limited only to Russia. On 28 January 2008, a cooperation agreement was signed between the European Space Agency and the Government of Ukraine. And this month a twinning agreement between the space agencies of Ukraine, Germany and France will been signed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The ISTC and STCU are already active in all these fields and they are meeting the challenge of integrating former weapon scientists into the wider international scientific community.

It is my hope that the 7th Framework Programme and other European programmes can extend and diversify the STCU and ISTC's current activities. I also encourage our EU Member States to pay attention to the potential of your Science Centres.

I am happy to lend my support to this conference. It offers a good opportunity for researchers, their organisations and companies to benefit from the knowledge and experience gained by former weapon scientists with interest in peaceful applications.

Together, we can address societal needs and global issues and prevent them from turning into conflicts and instability.

Cooperation in scientific research, technology development and innovation is an investment worth making. It is a must if we want to ensure good health, prosperity, a sound environment and a fair society.

Let me share this little story with you: if you meet with someone to share an apple, each one leaves with half an apple. But if you meet with someone to share an idea, each one will leave with two ideas ☺.

I wish you a fruitful meeting and sharing of many ideas.