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Keynote speech

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

SET-Plan Conference 2010, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones
Científicas (CSIC), Madrid, ES

Madrid, 3 June 2010

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here in Madrid at this third SET-Plan conference.

I am here because I, like you, firmly believe that moving definitively towards a low carbon economy is one of the critical challenges of the 21st Century. It is vital to help us combat climate change and to enhance the security of our energy supply. But, perhaps even more importantly, it is vital if the EU is to prosper in a carbon and resource constrained world.

In March, EU leaders agreed on the Europe 2020 strategy as the basis for making a successful exit from the economic crisis and putting us on the right track for a sustainable future. The Strategy is centred around smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Smart growth means developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation. Sustainable growth means promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy. Inclusive growth means fostering a high employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion.

I don't need to tell you that energy lies at the heart of all three of these. Without changing the way we generate, deliver and use energy in our homes, vehicles, industries and places of work and leisure, we will struggle to remain competitive and seriously risk falling behind in the intensifying global race to win low carbon technology markets.

In short, we need to innovate. Not only to develop new technologies, but also on products, processes, services, business models and so on. I see innovation in the widest possible sense.

Not surprisingly, research and innovation are a cornerstone of the Europe 2020 Strategy; one of the seven flagship initiatives is the Innovation Union, which aims at refocusing R&D and innovation policy on the challenges facing our society, including energy and climate change. Our first step will be to propose an ambitious Research and Innovation Plan, setting out how we intend to drive forward the research and innovation parts of the Europe 2020 agenda.

Of course, we are not starting from scratch. Initiatives like the SET-Plan already point the way forward to tackling major societal challenges. Others can learn from the experience that you have gained together over the past couple of years. The SET-Plan sets clear objectives and builds on existing initiatives in the field; it fosters a cooperative approach to research and innovation based on building partnerships; it has put in place a high level Steering Group to ensure progress and created a dedicated information system to support decision and policy making.

Perhaps most importantly, the SET-Plan, thanks to the efforts of all you stakeholders, has established clear and costed Technology Roadmaps for the next 10 years. All this gives us a clear visibility of where we want to go together and how we can achieve our common goals.

One of the novelties introduced by the SET-Plan is the European Industrial Initiatives. These will be large, multi-billion Euro technology development programmes in key industrial sectors for our future energy supply. They will bring together the best in European industry and research and help the public side to improve the coherence of our programming at EU and national level.

Reducing fragmentation and avoiding duplication of effort through such joint programming is all the more important in times when public finances are under pressure. We need to get the maximum out of every Euro, whether it is spent in Brussels, in Ireland or in Spain. Transforming our energy system on a low carbon model is going to be expensive enough, without all of us funding the same things at the same time.

I am therefore delighted that today we are launching the first four European Industrial Initiatives – on wind, solar energy, electricity grids and carbon capture and storage. It has taken a lot of work to get us to this point and I would like to thank all of those involved for their efforts. But, it is time now to stop the talking and get down to business. In launching these initiatives today, we are sending a clear message to the world that Europe intends to maintain our leadership on the development of low carbon technologies.

From the Commission side, I can assure you that we will support these initiatives with both human and financial resources. We have decided to focus our Community Programmes on the implementation of the SET-Plan and this will be reflected in future work programmes. Before the summer we will publish the FP7 Work Programme for 2011 and you will already see the prominence given to the European Industrial Initiatives – we are putting our money where our mouth is. And, our scientific officers will continue to proactively animate the EII Teams that have been set up to take the initiatives forward.

So, we will play our part. But, we have at our disposal only a small percentage of the total investment needed. The bulk of the resources to implement the initiatives will have to come from industry, the member states and the financial community. Only a collective effort, sharing risks and pooling resources, will enable us to progress at the speed required to get these technologies deployed cost-effectively at large scale. I count on all the parties in these partnerships to find the commitment, the political will and resources necessary to implement these initiatives. It is time for us all to step up to the plate and deliver.

Another piece of good news for the SET-Plan is that the European Energy Research Alliance is now also launching its first joint programmes, on wind, photovoltaics, smartgrids and geothermal energy. Our best national research institutes in Europe are putting together their existing resources into jointly agreed and comprehensive programmes of applied research.

Hundreds of person-years of research effort and world class facilities and infrastructures being harnessed to achieve common goals. This is truly impressive! In the wind programme alone, the Alliance has put together a total of 125 person-years effort from 14 research institutes. This is pan-European cooperation at its very best. I would like to congratulate all those involved in this initiative and look forward to receiving regular updates on progress. I am convinced that this is a model that can be followed in other research fields.

Finally, I would like to thank the Spanish Presidency for organising this conference. These events are just as vital to the success of the SET-Plan as its other elements. It is by getting together and sharing ideas and experiences, by making new contacts and friends, that we enrich the SET-Plan process and give it the momentum it deserves. Please make the most of these next two days together.

I wish you all a very successful and fruitful conference.

Thank you.