

**Opening address for Mr Z Stančič**

Theme of CREST

Research working party workshop

**"Family friendly scientific careers –  
towards an integrated model"**

**February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

I am honoured and proud to **welcome** you to the Family Friendly Scientific Careers workshop. You will excuse me but I only have a few minutes to share some thoughts with you. Indeed I feel so familiar here that after my speech I will go to the kitchens to personally cook a Slovenian meal for your lunch break.

You have heard in the words of Minister Kucler Dolinar the special emphasis that is currently placed on **increasing the number of people working in science** and improving their working conditions. I would like to briefly present here some of the initiatives that the European Commission is promoting to reach this objective.

The **potential of youth** is the key to healthy future societies. Let's start by looking at students, and how do they go about making the single major decision that will influence their career development, which is the choice of university degree. There are three main elements to be mentioned in this respect.

Firstly, what are the factors that influence study choices? How are sciences taught in school? In Europe, do we have the best approach to science education? To help us in answering this type of questions, we have enlightening recommendations from "Science Education now", the recently (2007) produced report of the **High Level Group on Science Education**. The Rocard report calls for a renewed pedagogy for the future of Europe, and suggests a shift from mainly deductive to inquiry-based methods in science education. Not only the inquiry-based approach proves more efficient than a mainly deductive one, and more easily applicable to pupils of different ages; it also has a greater capacity of attracting young people, particularly girls, to scientific careers.

Secondly, in addition to science educations, are there **gender-based preferences** to be taken into account? Statistical findings show that women are underrepresented in scientific and technological professions. What is the explanation for this? If technical studies contained more socially relevant courses, would that attract more women? In the framework of the Bologna process, there is a good debate going on in scientific literature and Member States on male and female preferences for certain fields. However we believe that still more light needs to be shed on this. Therefore, the first 2008 Call for Proposals of the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (Capacities Specific Programme) will fund actions to investigate gender-based preferences and choice of study fields by girls and boys.

Thirdly, we need to look at the working conditions of those who choose to follow a career in sciences. The importance of family friendly and work-life balance measures clearly emerged from the results of the **consultation on the ERA Green Paper**. 88% of respondents to the ERA Green Paper consultation considered that more women would be attracted to and stay in research careers if working and funding conditions

that foster a better work/life-balance are created. It is also interesting to note that the majority of respondents to the consultation (ie 63%) were men.

Greater gender equality is a major element that can increase the appeal of scientific careers. An integrated approach should take into consideration elements such as the promotion of equal pay, working conditions, career opportunities and vocational training for women and men, as well as facilities to care for children and the elderly.

These elements are also at the heart of the forthcoming Commission Communication on a **European Researchers' "Passport"**, which is currently under preparation and is planned for adoption by late April – May 2008. This Communication is one of the follow-up actions of the ERA Green Paper exercise and proposes a renewed, three year partnership between Member States and Commission. A partnership to act in a more focussed, coherent and result oriented way in selected key-areas affecting mobility and careers of researchers across Europe. We need such a new impulse to decisively ameliorate the “eco-system” for researchers in response to the growing concern about the rising global competition for the most talented researchers.

Based upon agreed common objectives and sustained commitment by Member States to deliver, the partnership would aim to accelerate progress in key areas including social security, competition-based, trans-national recruitment and portability of funding, fair employment and working conditions, as well as agendas for training and skills. The results of these actions would constitute the equivalent to a researchers' “passport”, decisively facilitating “brain circulation” and improving career prospects for women and men researchers across the EU.

We have thus said that family friendly scientific careers will attract more women to this path. Let's now quickly look at where we currently stand.

To start from EU funded research, a 1999 Commission Communication on Women and Science set at 40% the target number of **women in the Research Framework Programmes** and all its related groups, panels, committees and projects. By systematically implementing a gender monitoring exercise, we have been able to clearly observe progress since the late nineties. For example, the proportion of women in Advisory Groups rose from 4% in FP4 (1994-1998) to 27% in FP6 (2002-2006). Also, the proportion of women in Monitoring Panels rose from 6% in FP4 to 35% in FP5 (1998-2002), and peaked at 50% in FP6. These are encouraging results.

Our other main source of statistical information on women in science is the She Figures publication. "**She Figures**" collects sex-disaggregated data in the Research and Development sector. Despite the persistence of an underrepresentation of women in science, the 2006 version of "She Figures" registered some progress. From 1999 to 2003, there was an increase in the number of researchers in Europe. In this context, the growth of women researchers was twice the growth rate for men (4% and 2% respectively). As a consequence, in 2003, 29% of Europe's researchers in 2003

were women, up 2% since 1999. I would like to repeat here that the Commission considers the collection of sex-disaggregated data on R&D a powerful tool to show inequalities, and recently launched a call for tender for the production of "She Figures" 2009.

An entire chapter of the She Figures publication analyses how the scientific agenda is being set. By looking at availability of research funding, board membership, share of national research funding, and pay gaps, She Figures raises crucial questions on women in scientific decision-making. An insufficient number of female researchers limits the scope of the voices heard, affects the quality of science production, and of course lowers the chances to realise fully the European workforce potential in the Science and Technology fields. This is why we are indeed looking forward to hear the analysis and the recommendations that have been produced by the **WIRDEM** Expert Group on Women in Research Decision Making.

Generally speaking, a major barrier to the career development of women and men in scientific fields remains however in widespread stereotypical attitudes in the public arena, as well as in the scientific community; which often cling to outdated notions of how and **why science is done and who does it**. Gender and mobility management in universities and research organisations have to be further investigated to shed more light on how excellence in research is attained. The target community for the Commission strategy on this will include young people, the scientific community itself, and the public at large, especially parents.

For an overview of equal opportunities legislation and policy measures in the countries covered by the 7th Framework Programme, in addition to five Western Balkans countries<sup>1</sup>, I would certainly recommend the "**Benchmarking Policy Measures for Gender Equality in Science**" report. The report starts from an overview of the policies implemented in the different countries covered, to then evaluate them, and test their correlation with indicators measuring the presence of women in science, across different seniority levels. The exercise offers valuable insights on what are the policy options, how they are linked to factual observations, and what is the scope for further work on measures for women in science.

Let me leave you with a few words on our present and future. Today there is real **political commitment at the highest levels** to ensure equal opportunities for women researchers and to overcome structural barriers to the conciliation of work and private life for both sexes. Science and Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik will take part in a 2009 conference to showcase the political path and practical actions undertaken between 1999-2009 to increase the presence of women in science. Also, the European Parliament adopted in January a report on raising awareness of the role and situation of women in industry.

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<sup>1</sup> Albania; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; Montenegro; and Serbia

In conclusion, we can say that over the last years we identified obstacles but also registered some progress. There are persisting barriers to the development of a family friendly scientific job market, but there is also growing awareness that things in practice cannot be left to develop at a relatively slow pace. This is what animates the work of task forces, experts groups, committees such as the Scientific and Technical Research Committee (CREST), and us in the Commission. The ERA Green Paper follow-up actions under development and in particular the researchers' "passport" are to marry the necessary commitment to actions that take the key-issues at hand a leap-step further; and to clearly demonstrate that in this endeavour we all should and can be real partners in the European Research Area.

I wish you a fruitful and challenging workshop and personally hope you will enjoy your stay in beautiful Slovenia.

Thank you.