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The EIT's vision for the Future

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

Opening Speech at the Strategic Innovation Agenda Stakeholder
Conference

Budapest, 14 April 2011

State Secretary Cséfalvay,
Chairman Schuurmans,
Distinguished members of the EIT Governing Board,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy to be here this morning to talk about the EIT and its Strategic Innovation Agenda.

The EIT is one of those projects that have the ability to shape our future. It has the potential to change dramatically the innovation landscape in Europe. In my view, the EIT reflects the way, we – Europeans - are addressing the innovation challenge: ***integrated and united towards a common goal, but flexible enough to respect the diversity of its actors.***

These past few years we have seen the EIT grow from an idea to a concrete reality. Many of you here today are part of this reality on a daily basis; and I would like to congratulate the EIT and the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) – *KIC InnoEnergy, Climate KIC and EIT ICT Labs* – for what you have achieved so far. You can be proud. In less than a year - a record time for such complex partnerships- you have set up an entirely new type of partnership.

I am also very pleased that the EIT Foundation is now operating. It will help the EIT, and ultimately the KICs, to attract funding from the private sector. This is an innovative feature of the EIT concept, and the first time a foundation like this has been set up in an EU context.

The EIT is, however, still a work in progress. For the KICs, 2010 was the year of development, and I expect **2011 to be the year of delivery**. With the EIT and its KICs, we have the opportunity to build a unique European model of interaction

But it is now urgent and extremely important that the KICs prove, through concrete results, the value and the efficiencies of these partnerships. By working closely together, those who are part of the knowledge triangle of higher education, research and business/innovation can create tangible benefits for all:

First, the KICs will create **new business opportunities** through their integration of an **entrepreneurial culture** into their education and research activities. Some of the KICs have set clear and ambitious targets in that respect for the next 3 years, and I welcome that.

Second, the KICs are not just virtual networks; they have a **strong geographical base**. They are anchored in their local and regional communities through their co-location centres. These co-location centres, 16 across the 3 KICS, have the potential to and must become world-class innovative clusters.

Third, the KICs **empower people through education** and this is a major novelty of the concept. Education is often the missing ingredient of more classical partnerships between research and business. I am extremely happy that this is a dimension the 3 KICs have taken up very seriously. I welcome the fact that *KIC InnoEnergy* will start the first EIT/KIC master courses in September, followed by the other two KICs the following year. This will be central to showcase the idea of the EIT.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are entering now a crucial moment for the EIT, and I would like to raise a few points that I believe are critical for the EIT's future.

First and this is the reason we are here today, there is of course the **Strategic Innovation Agenda (SIA)** outlining the EIT's priorities and objectives for the next seven years. This Agenda will be instrumental to define the thematic focus of the future KICs and the strategic activities that the EIT should develop over the coming years. I am therefore very grateful for the EIT and the Hungarian presidency to have organised this important conference today.

As you know, I must submit the SIA to the Member States and the European Parliament by the end of this year, on the basis of the EIT's draft to be submitted by June but also taking into account the results of an independent evaluation of the EIT and input from the stakeholder consultations.

My intention is also to present a proposal for amending the EIT regulation. I will of course in that perspective build on the experience gained and the lessons learnt from the first round of KICs. Changes are necessary if we want to make the model even more efficient. For this reason, I have commissioned an independent evaluation of the EIT. I expect the results by the end of May. I have also recently launched an open public consultation on the SIA which will run until June. I invite you all to participate and to be as open and constructive as possible in your answers.

The political process towards the adoption of the SIA is going to be long. But you can count on my personal commitment to ensure the EIT a sound future. And to be successful we need to work together so that the Strategic Innovation Agenda I will propose in December this year to the co-legislators is a convincing and credible document. In this spirit, I am looking very much forward to today's discussions.

The second point I wanted to raise has to do with the Multiannual Financial Framework. This year is decisive for the place the EIT will have within the next Financial Framework and **the Common Strategic Framework** for Research and Innovation being prepared by my colleague, Commissioner Geoghegan Quinn.

I believe that positioning the EIT within the Common Strategic Framework will help to develop synergies and present a more coherent EU innovation landscape. Moreover, the EIT will clearly gain in visibility and will benefit from closer relations with other EU funding sources. I therefore fully support this approach.

However, we need to be very clear about the specific role of the EIT in the renewed EU innovation and higher education landscape: **the EIT can make a real impact only if it remains a flexible institution that is not put into the straitjacket of traditional funding mechanisms.**

As you know, the EIT is characterised by a strong level of flexibility and autonomy. It follows a business and results-oriented approach, making the KICs attractive for the private sector. It is equipped with a light and flexible governance structure and operates under flexible financial rules.

I am determined not to put additional burden on the KICs which would render them less attractive and go against the very purpose of the EIT. To that end, I am working in close cooperation with Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn. It is part and parcel of this approach to define a "smart" way of providing funding for the EIT which will preserve the flexibility and autonomy that are essential to its success.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The EIT plant is growing, but it is up to us now to make it bloom as the chair of the Friends of EIT group at the European Parliament- Mrs Carvalho- said. I am convinced we have in our hands the necessary ingredients to make the EIT a true catalyst for innovation in Europe. I am therefore very much looking forward to fruitful and constructive discussions today.

Thank you for your attention