

Check against delivery!



Commissioner Janez POTOČNIK

*Speech*

***Launch Conference of the European  
Technology Platform on Sustainable  
Nuclear Energy (SNE-TP)***

*Brussels, Belgium  
21 September 2007*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you here today on the occasion of the launch of the Sustainable Nuclear Energy Technology Platform.

The launch of this platform represents an important moment in research and innovation in a field with a long European pedigree, and it is indeed significant that so many leaders from the nuclear research and industrial sectors are here in the audience.

The issues confronting Europe in the area of energy are serious and affect us all. How we deal with them will have an impact on the future well-being of our citizens, the competitiveness of our industry, and the state of our environment. In its Energy and Climate Change "Package" of 10<sup>th</sup> January this year, the European Commission clearly recognised the seriousness of the issues confronting Europe in this field. These concern not only greenhouse gas emissions and associated climate change, but also security of supply and competitiveness of our industry.

Our society runs on energy, and the ability to provide a secure, non-polluting, safe and affordable supply is one of the principal challenges facing governments, policy makers, industry and the research community alike.

To address these challenges, the Commission made a series of proposals, including specific measures to accelerate key low-carbon technologies to the market. In particular, the Commission proposed to draw up a Strategic Energy Technology Plan framing the research, development and accelerated deployment of a broad range of energy technologies, from renewables, through clean coal, to nuclear fusion and fission.

This broad portfolio approach to energy research is already a key ingredient of the research being conducted as part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme.

The Member States addressed the energy and climate change issues at the March Council Summit, and agreed ambitious and far-reaching objectives, particularly regarding renewables and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. They endorsed the Commission's proposal to establish a Community Strategic Energy Technology Plan, and this will now become one of the principal instruments in our repertoire, being a clear recognition of the role that technology can play in resolving our energy problems. It requires a reinforced and increasingly integrated research effort in all energy technologies, in order to transform our research and innovation system to be able to meet these objectives.

The European Commission recognised in the energy package the role played by nuclear energy in limiting greenhouse gas emissions and in contributing to Europe's competitiveness and security of supply. Nuclear energy is currently the largest single source of low carbon base-load electricity in Europe and is clearly a factor in the equation.

However, it is imperative that Member States choosing nuclear power maintain very high standards of safety, waste management, security and non-proliferation, both now and in the future. This is enshrined in European Law under the provisions of the Euratom Treaty, one of the founding Treaties of European integration and celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

The initiative to launch a European Technology Platform in sustainable nuclear energy is therefore both timely and welcome. Through the development of an EU-wide Strategic Research Agenda and Deployment Strategy, it should ensure

enhanced coordination between national and industrial programmes while guaranteeing the most effective use of Euratom Framework Programme funding.

It also underlines the important research dimension of the nuclear sector, the role research must play in maintaining high levels of safety, the importance of retaining competences and know-how and the increasingly competitive nature of this global industry.

I'm sure you are aware that European Technology Platforms already exist in many other fields of research. Indeed, many of you may well be involved as partners in one or more of these initiatives. Technology Platforms are important contributors to the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme and are providing important inputs to the annual work programmes via their strategic research agendas. The role of industry in these platforms is an essential driving force ensuring that the research effort is geared toward innovation and the market.

I stress that these platforms belong to their respective stakeholders, but it is true that the Commission fully supports the establishing of such platforms where there is a clear and agreed common vision, broad stakeholder support and involvement, and a willingness to collaborate effectively in research and development.

This includes the need for platforms to work together and explore possible synergies, for instance in the broad area of energy research where there are a number of key cross-cutting issues. I wish to underline this – my firm belief is that the future should see more cooperation between various actors, not further fragmentation.

When these conditions are fulfilled we are convinced there will be positive impacts for Europe as a whole regarding creation, sharing and exploitation of knowledge.

These, after all, are the aims of the European Research Area and constitute an important aspect of the Lisbon Strategy for the development of the knowledge-based economy for growth and jobs.

Priority areas of nuclear research of common interest have been clearly identified in the Euratom Framework Programmes over the years, and the 7<sup>th</sup> such programme was adopted unanimously by the Member States in December last year. This Community research effort in this area is entirely consistent with the objectives of the Technology Platform being launched today, and the platform's strategic research agenda will provide good guidance on where scarce Community funds can best be concentrated. However, the present Community programme can only contribute a fraction of what is required in this field.

This is why I am especially glad to see so many representatives from the industrial sector here today, indicating the interest and willingness of industry to play its rightful role in this process. We expect the involvement of industry to increase further as the current phase of more fundamental research is moving towards a phase of demonstration of innovative reactor technologies. Cooperation between all actors, public and private, national research organisations and industry, has always been an integral part of the European research effort in the nuclear field, and the Commission is very keen to see that this is even further enhanced with this new initiative.

However, one must clearly recognize the challenges that lie ahead in the nuclear sector. We must ensure that high levels of nuclear safety are maintained. We must ensure that waste will not be a burden for future generations. We must perfect our knowledge of innovative reactor concepts. We must ensure that competences and know-how are retained in a sector that has become less glamorous in recent years. In turn, addressing these issues will ensure long-term competitiveness of Europe's

nuclear sector in the face of increasingly stiff competition from abroad. Once again, the new Technology Platform is essential in addressing these challenges.

Since the platform brings together Europe's best nuclear scientists and engineers in a broad range of disciplines, it will be the principal body for taking crucial technology-based decisions, and it will also ensure that technical safety issues continue to be dealt with by the most competent specialists in broad cooperation at the European Union level. I understand that this emphasis on the technical dimension does not mean that other dimensions are ignored. To be effective, this initiative must go hand in hand with others, for example the new European Nuclear Energy Forum and the High-Level Group on safety and waste, both of which are also being set up this autumn. The new European Nuclear Energy Forum in particular has the specific remit of bringing all interested stakeholders together to discuss the pros and cons of this energy form.

I would like to thank the broad range of research stakeholders that have come together over recent weeks and months in the preparation of this Platform, its vision report and this launch conference. As with other Technology Platforms, success will depend on strong and bottom-up stakeholder involvement supported through a transparent and inclusive approach to membership of the Platform itself. This should also extend to interested civil society organisations wishing to enter into constructive debate.

Ultimately, the decision whether or not to use nuclear power – just like any other energy source – is a political and societal one taken principally at the national level. However, this should be a decision taken from a position of knowledge, not one taken in ignorance. Research can and must supply this knowledge, and the Sustainable Nuclear Energy Technology Platform is the best guarantor that this research will be carried out effectively and with Europe's best interests in mind.

I would like to wish all present and future stakeholders the greatest possible success.

Thank you.