



VALÉRIE PÉCRESSÉ

Monsieur le Président of the Conseil économique, social et environnemental, Jacques Dermagne, Madame la Présidente of the CNRS, Professors, Ladies and Gentlemen, please allow me to tell you how delighted I am to be with you this morning to open the discussions which will be taking place over the next two days and which I am sure will be particularly rich and constructive.

These discussions are taking place under the aegis of an institution which is a centre par excellence in France for dialogue among the great minds of the nation. As the chairman mentioned, the Conseil économique, social et environnemental advises the authorities wisely and with the benefit of experience on the decisions which must be taken. The current reorganization of research in France owes much to it. The work done by the Conseil in advance of the laws adopted in 2006 was of particular benefit to the government. I want to thank the president for agreeing immediately and enthusiastically to host this event at the Palais d'Iéna. We also benefited from the experience of Jean Jouzel and Jean-Pierre Alix, and from the support of M.U.R.S., who were the kingpins, and I would like to thank them.

Therefore, I think that we can safely say that we have met all the necessary conditions for this conference to make an effective contribution to the French Presidency of the European Union in the field of research and as you are aware our theme is "Science at the service of society". This objective, which is the main theme on our agenda today, has already been the focus of several events in recent months, however none of these has yet been able to bring together all those keen to promote dialogue between men and women of science and public policy makers. This dialogue, which each of you builds on a daily basis through your professional roles, will form the core of our discussions. The challenge which brings us together is that of renewing the pact which society has made with science dating back to Galileo and Descartes, by locating it at the heart of its thinking and its economic, social, and cultural activities.

Contemporary societies, with their new landmarks, techniques and frontiers, have created a new context which forces us to remodel the means and ends of scientific policy. The dialogue between science and society has always consisted of a dual perception of science by society. On the one hand, society sometimes creates a false picture of science as something artificial, cold, disturbing even, made up of researchers hidden away in laboratories and possessed of a taste for abstraction which is inaccessible to the uninitiated. This distance, or rather this perception of distance has sometimes

been conducive to making society wary of science.

This phenomenon, or gap, was already starting to appear several decades ago, but I must admit, as Minister for Research, that I feel that it is now assuming worrying proportions. Thirty years ago, two thirds of citizens trusted science absolutely. Today, fewer than half of Europeans share this trust in science, i.e. not the majority of Europeans. Over the same period, however, science has also revealed a new face with which we are all familiar – the marvellous adventure of mankind making progress thanks to enthusiastic, daring and demanding women and men. Once unsuccessful trials and failures are analyzed and overcome, they become the source of the greatest discoveries. It is an undertaking on the part of mankind for mankind. We know that scientists do not live in a world apart; quite the opposite is true since they are working on behalf of the world. This other face of science is about scientific effort focused on the needs of society, primarily its material needs of course, because we have to take up very practical challenges on a daily basis, but not exclusively. These needs are also intellectual and advances in knowledge are themselves a response to the thirst for knowledge which drives our species and which is the secret behind its progress.

I think that these two aspects of science are the reference points that you must bear in mind during your discussions over the

next two days. Dialogue between society and science cannot overlook these contrasting aspects, all the more so because society has never experienced such deep and rapid transformations as in the post-war period. The democratization of access to knowledge, the information boom, the technological revolution which makes knowledge more accessible to the majority of people are societal transformations which force us to frame this dialogue in terms which were perhaps hitherto unfamiliar to us.

Henceforth, the dialogue between society and science has to be placed within the framework of a knowledge society whose development in Europe is based on the Lisbon strategy. A knowledge society is first and foremost a marvellous opportunity for simpler and faster communication between science and society. However this undoubtedly requires all stakeholders in the scientific community to organize this dialogue along new lines. The hostility expressed by certain citizens on the issue of GM crops, concern about the development of nanotechnologies and the difficulties of tackling major bio-ethical issues dispassionately are all scientific topics which raise questions about the very essence of our society and especially about the bonds which must be created between science and society. I know this only too well as before becoming a Minister I was responsible for organizing this debate in Parliament in 2004. These topics provoke discussion, thought and even clashes over what science can and cannot do.

I am convinced that the absence of an organized forum for debate on all these issues fosters misunderstanding which sometimes becomes antagonism. Some of our European partners have clearly understood this. In Scandinavian countries like Denmark or Norway for instance, these topics are openly discussed, allowing them to be tackled calmly. However these countries are the exception in Europe. Their experience is useful as a model, but it needs to be adapted to the culture of each member State. Therefore, we have to do more because the social challenges facing us far transcend our national borders. As Europe is preparing to offer men and women scientists a more integrated forum, we need to find a way of organizing this dialogue at a European level, as Jean-Pierre Alix has very clearly stated. These new methods, these "major dialogues", will have to be developed in the future and I would like your work to help us draft the outline, as I mentioned before, within the framework of a European knowledge forum, which will allow us to overcome the conflict and fear, which are sometimes closely related to the national cultures of member States.

Fortunately, the dialogue between society and science that we shall reinvent together can rely on citizens' undiminished appetite for learning about the aims of research, be it fundamental or applied. The success of the "*Ville Européenne des Sciences*" organized at the Grand Palais within the framework of the "*Fête de la science*" which came to a close yesterday proved this once and for all.

When science mobilizes itself to tackle questions from those people for whom its work is intended, then it becomes popular again and attracts the crowds. Almost 50,000 visitors over three days came to meet scientists and to question them about the aims of their work and the scope of their discoveries. This demonstrates that all the stakeholders in the scientific community must also organize at their own level new forms of dialogue with society and communication with fellow citizens.

Of course, we will have to organize this dialogue with the aim of responding to the major challenges of our times; there is no better way to demonstrate what science does for mankind. I am thinking of the challenges of energy and climate change, Jean Jouzel, but I am also thinking about the world food crisis and the development of diseases linked to our increasingly elderly population. To state that science is the only solution for most of these new fears is to acknowledge the primary role that the whole research system must play in a state effort to overcome new challenges. This is why many of our countries have chosen to make their research priorities more visible.

This is what the French government has decided to do by organizing this major debate which will bring together the scientific community, the various stakeholders and the socio-economic sector in order jointly to draft a national strategy for research and innovation. It will take into account the exis-

tence of a true continuum stretching all the way from the most fundamental type of research up to the level of innovation. In this respect, our national strategy for research and innovation - for which the groundwork involved widespread consultation with the scientific community, businesses and other stakeholders - will respond to the need to make French scientific policy more accessible and more comprehensible to the majority of people.

This dialogue between science and society must also take place within a European framework. This is one of the tasks entrusted to the French Presidency, which is preparing a "2020 Vision for the European Research Area" for release on 2nd December. With our European partners, we would like to envisage this as a free forum where all European scientists can meet and where the free circulation of knowledge would become a "fifth freedom" granted to all European citizens. However, we would also like to envisage it as a forum to promote discussion and exchanges on the aspirations of European citizens with regards a science which must coordinate itself on a more European level if it is to rise to the major social challenges.

We need to try to define a multi-dimensional dialogue - a dialogue between science and citizens and a dialogue between European countries and citizens. The dialogue would take place on two levels, national and European. However this huge networking

task will be futile unless we first manage to restore the prestige of science and scientists in society.

Each of our governments bears responsibility for this. The French government is making research a budgetary priority. This priority is being restated year on year and is being confirmed and emphasized even as one of the worst economic and financial crises ever known is being predicted, thus sending out a message with a unique impact on society as a whole. Not only are we demonstrating to society the trust which we place in science, but we are saying in particular that a good proportion of the solution to the crisis will come from science. This is the reason why the President of the Republic and the German Chancellor have decided to devote the Franco-German Council of Ministers being held today in Paris to research and innovation. This is also the reason why the European economic crisis recovery strategy to be presented by the Commission on Wednesday will place great emphasis on the need to support European research.

On a similar note, I shall suggest to the President of the Republic that the meeting of the European Council on December 11th-12th could express a unanimous desire on the part of all member States to focus on research and innovation as a means of tackling the crisis. Looking beyond this very serious crisis, it is also up to the authorities to enhance the profile of scientific professions in our society.

In France, this is the purpose behind the “Plan carrières” [careers plan] which I presented a few days ago. This plan establishes a proper work contract for Ph.D. students, more transparent recruitment procedures, improved terms for junior lecturers at the start of their careers, with immediate salary increases of between 12 and 25% for new young recruits. These measures are part of a European Partnership for Researchers initiative, adopted at last September’s Competitiveness Council meeting, and will encourage all member States to take regular stock of progress made towards enhancing the profile of careers and promoting mobility for researchers within the European Research Area, which unfortunately currently stands at just 3%.

We have to act quickly. Global competition demands it. This is why I have asked my colleagues in Luxembourg and Portugal to put forward urgent new measures and they will present their proposals to all the European research ministers on December 2nd. We want to make the European Research Area more attractive, including for European researchers who have left Europe to pursue their careers elsewhere with resources that were not available within our borders. All these decisions aimed at promoting scientific professions and demonstrating the strategic benefits of science for society, especially in times of economic crisis, will enable us to reposition science at the heart of society and guarantee it greater visibility.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, establishing a new dialogue between science and society is a joint challenge. It is our common lot. In order to rise to the challenge, all partners in the field of science have to work together in the long term. Collectively, we have to demonstrate imagination in what is sometimes a complex knowledge society in order to pre-empt and support discussions around the aims and means governing scientific policy. However, I am convinced that the many talented people gathered here for the next two days will make a decisive contribution to the emergence of new answers to this democratic requirement. This is why I would like to thank you in advance.

JEAN JOUZEL

Thank you Madame la Ministre, for presenting this broad view of our conference in your opening speech on the problems of science and society. I am thinking in particular of the European perspective. The presence of Mrs Schavan, the German Federal Minister of Training and Research whom I would now like to invite to join us, underlines this European dimension.