

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome all of you on behalf of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. Let me express my particular joy that we have the privilege to meet the representatives of All European Academies: the vice president Professor Nicolas Mann and the Executive Director Dr. Ruediger Klein. We also have with us the representative of the European Commission, Dr. Waldemar Kütt. I am also most happy to welcome our speakers. First of whom came from afar: Dr. Frąckowiak from Brussels and Professor Luty from Wrocław, representing the Conference of Rectors of Polish Universities. We have also an important delegation from Warsaw: Professor Duszyński, the Polish minister of science, Professor Józwiak from the Polish Council of Science, Professor Górski, representing the Polish Academy of Sciences, Professor Wrochna from the Institute of Nuclear Problems and Dr. Bem-Andrzejewska representing ESFRI. It is of course also a great pleasure to have with us Professor Musioł, Rector of the best Polish university, a co-organizer of this meeting and Professor Maria Nowakowska from the Commission for European Matters of our Academy.

This meeting was organized by the Commission for European Matters of our Academy, chaired by Professor Turała and by the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University, chaired by Professor Mach.

We came here to discuss the European Research Area, the great idea which gives the research in Europe a chance to become again the number one in the world. It is rather obvious, however, that the road to this goal will not be easy and will not be short. Therefore, instead of praising the project, I will use the few minutes I have, to express my worries. The worries which, I hope, we shall eventually overcome.

The point I would like to raise is that, for the countries like Poland, the construction of the European Research Area represents at the same time both: a chance, and a danger.

The chance is obvious: the possibility to take part in such a futuristic endeavour gives -no doubt- the opportunities which were, until now, far beyond reach of Polish researches. Participation in the large international projects gives us indeed a chance of which we could not even dreamt in the past.

There are also dangers, however. As far as I understand, the basic principle in construction of the European Research Area is the free competition in which those better prepared are supposed to win. This principle is of course correct. Unfortunately, one has to face the fact that it implies a tremendous handicap for the countries like Poland which, for many years, had rather limited possibilities to develop the scientific infrastructure and to participate in an international effort on a really serious level. We have to admit that we are not yet fully prepared for the free competition with European giants. In these conditions the so-called fair competition becomes actually highly unfair.

One may say: so what? Let the European science develop in places which are best suited for the task. After all, the challenges of globalization demand a strong concentration of efforts in all areas and science should not be an exception here.

I think there are at least two reasons why such an argument is not correct and, worse, it is highly unrealistic. The first reason is political. I do not think that any European country,

any European government, will be willing to accept -on the long run- the role of a second-class area in science. Let me explain: in US any gifted youngster from, say, Kansas will eventually end up at one of the best universities, e.g. in Boston, and will most likely stay there. No problem, this is one country.

Imagine, however, that most of the gifted Europeans will be forced to end up in Paris, Oxford, or Heidelberg because they will not find adequate possibilities in their own countries. Such situation is politically unacceptable and will surely create an instability of the whole system.

The second, more important, reason is scientific. The great advantage, great attraction of Europe is its diversity. This diversity may be sometimes troublesome in politics and in economy because it can prevent a coordinated action. The diversity is, however, invaluable in research and Europe should take a maximal advantage of it. We all know very well that in research a dominance of one way of thinking leads, sooner or later, to stagnation.

Therefore I observe with an increasing concern such things as the tendency to develop the great scientific centres predominantly in the western part of our continent, the dramatic disparity between the researchers' salaries here and in the west, the concentration of majority of European scientific journals in hands of just two editorial houses. And, unfortunately, one hardly sees any serious effort on the part of the European authorities to prevent or at least to soften these tendencies.

I am convinced that a thorough analysis and a frank discussions are necessary to clear up these worries and thus to improve the chances of the final success of the European Research Area.

Thank you for your attention.

Andrzej Białas

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