



VISIT TO THE MARNE : SPEECH BY M. JACQUES CHIRAC, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC - EXCERPTS -

Research - policy for industry -

(Reims, 30 August 2005)

(...)

First of all, a new impetus for our research. I decided that a pluriannual estimates Act (loi-programme Act authorizing the government to take measures involving expenditure covering several financial years) was needed for research: it will be put before Parliament in the next few weeks.

The bill will reaffirm the importance of basic research for our country, not only because the advancement of knowledge is a legitimate aim in itself, but also because it paves the way for future applications. The ITER project will open new avenues towards the development of an energy which is almost unlimited and has no impact on the climate. Following the example of the ITER project, we will be providing encouragement for our basic research, our physics, our chemistry, our mathematics, our natural sciences.

(...)

The National Research Agency will apply a resolutely new method of funding, centred on the project culture which lies at the heart of the scientific approach. The 2005 calls for projects have met with considerable success. In fields which are as varied as they are important for our future be it supercomputers, CO2 storage, biodiversity, the neurosciences, fuel cells or the nanosciences, the Agency is going to allow us to stop spreading funds too thinly and allocate substantial resources to the priorities decided by the nation. It will also fund innovative projects put forward spontaneously by the researchers themselves, and especially by young research teams.

We are going to release substantial resources, commensurate with our ambitions: 6 billion over 3 years, 3,000 extra research posts in 2006, and as many again in 2007. Outlay on this scale has not been seen for over 20 years.

It will be matched by the resolute modernization of State-funded research. This is what researchers are waiting for.

(...)



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New forms of cooperation must also be established and this will be one of the priorities under the new legislation. This is because the competition between institutions, which at times has been rather sterile, has now been overtaken by the globalization of research. (...)

And finally, the young. Europe as a whole is suffering from a shortage of researchers: it is urgent to attract the best minds to a career in research, because the driving force behind the research of the future will be today's doctoral students. And I want to assure them of our support. We shall create the pathways for them to succeed. The posts to be established from next year will create quite a different atmosphere. At the beginning of their careers, those combining teaching and research will be able to have a teaching load which has been adjusted to take into account a scientific project assessed for support: they will be able to concentrate their energies, and explore the new scientific paths more effectively. We will create a more attractive working environment: it is unacceptable that our young scientists sometimes have to leave France in order to carry out their projects.

The second pillar of the nationwide effort to promote innovation is a new policy for industry.

Clearly, there can be no question of returning to the methods and practices of an earlier age. Industrial "colbertism"⁽¹⁾ had its day, but that day has gone. And France can no longer afford to be inward-looking. The State must not claim to be able to decide for industry which products are to be developed, which partnerships established or which markets won. However, the State has a responsibility to promote an environment which is propitious for the development of major industrial projects. This implies having clear strategic priorities: a small number of substantial stimulating programmes concentrated in a small number of key technological areas. It means that everyone involved, SMEs and research laboratories must network around major enterprises. It implies a European dimension, without which any grand industrial goal would be futile.

This is the framework in which the Industrial Innovation Agency will operate. I am pleased to establish it officially here today. (...)

The core aim of this agency is to steer our industrial fabric towards the high-technology sectors, those which will create the jobs of the future. Its aim is also to resist the tyranny of the short term. Today, the State, as it did successfully with Airbus and Ariane, is again ensuring it has the necessary resources to launch projects with a promising future using different instruments, tailored to an open economy, but with the same aim. The Agency will therefore be concerned with long-term projects 5 to 15 years, for example programmes with a timescale beyond the normal one for the financial markets.

These programmes, put forward by industry, will be in technologies likely to lead to large profitable markets. The principle underpinning the Agency's



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action is that the risks will be shared between the State and its industrial partners: this is why projects will systematically be co-funded and the advancement of sums to be repaid if the project succeeds will be the preferred mode of funding for the Agency. Depending on the type of project concerned, the Agency will also grant subsidies to help with risk-taking.

The priority sectors are familiar to us all: energy, health, the information and communication technologies, non-polluting and secure forms of transport. In all these sectors we possess real technological and industrial strengths, but we have a considerable amount of work to do if we are to develop "breakpoint" technologies to serve the people in our country, their health and their environment.

Proposed programmes have already been identified: the development of a multimedia Internet search engine; programmes in the booming sector of mobile telephony and multimedia terminals; new-generation imaging machines to improve our understanding and treatment of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and the development of biophotonics to find better treatments, for example for skin cancers.

We must go even further: and I hope that industry will submit to the Agency research programmes addressing the crucial challenges presented by the environment and climate change: for example, the fuel cell, solar energy and the clean car. The price of oil may well remain high long term: it is essential that we give new impetus to our energy policy. That will involve energy-saving programmes, but also the development of new technologies. It's a necessity for the planet. It is also a market with huge potential.

(...)

The European dimension is an integral part of the Industrial Innovation Agency. (...) And the aid granted by the Agency will obviously comply with EU regulations. The Agency will establish partnerships with the equivalent European institutions. It will liaise with the Eureka organization. I propose that a European Innovation Agency be established without delay; we are prepared to contribute our agency and its funding. (...)

I'd also like to convey a special message here to the leaders of the top French companies. You have built remarkably successful groups which, at the beginning of the 1980s, followed the international development route and became world-ranking champions in their sectors. Of the 100 largest European companies, 32 are French. France, with only 1% of the world's population, has 11 of her own major groups in the league table of the world's top 100 corporations. For our country, this is a strength. For Europe, it is a strength.

Today, you must enter into a new partnership for progress with our nation.



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Firstly, there has to be more and better targeted investment in research in France. Two thirds of the effort to achieve our goal of 3% of GDP for research will have to be made by the private sector.

Secondly, there's a need to bring in the small and medium-sized enterprises, which, alongside you, are making an essential and increasingly essential contribution to growth and innovation. It is up to you to involve them more closely in your research efforts and enter into strategic joint ventures with them. For its part, the State, as the leading purchaser of technology, will undertake to provide incentives: the government will submit a proposal to the European Commission on a mechanism allowing some of the work in technology-related public procurement contracts to be reserved for SMEs.

(...)

Finally, we will eliminate something that is a handicap for our country: our research and industry sectors do not work together enough. Research establishments do excellent scientific work. When it comes to innovation, our corporate sector does more than simply hold its own. But even if progress has been made, all too often these two worlds remain unaware of each other. Now, with our "competitiveness centres", we're going to change the scenario and opt firmly for partnership. This is a real turning point and is the third plank of our policy to promote industrial innovation.

It is quite clear: from Silicon Valley in California to the Fukuoka region of Japan, real progress in innovation depends on a strong synergy between State-funded research laboratories, privately-run research centres and production plants.

The message of our "competitiveness centres" is that all the stakeholders intend to work together. They symbolize the vitality and the ambition of France in this sphere. They open a new window of opportunity for every part of our country.

(...)

(...) 67 centres have been selected to become "competitiveness centres" following an invitation to tender projects which revealed an exceptional wealth of talents and ideas throughout France.

In October, the government will set out the terms and conditions under which State aid will be granted so that it can be immediately available. (...)

We have in us all the wherewithal, all the talents, ambition and energy we need to reach the forefront of world competition in the sphere of innovation. With this new industrial research and innovation policy we are launching now, we are seizing the great challenges of the coming years.



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Given the scale of the tasks ahead, given the speed at which the world is changing now, we must believe in our strengths and have an ambitious world view. We must join together, and act together, to realize this grand design for France and for Europe./.

(1) economic policy based on a high degree of State control (Colbert was Louis XIV's chief minister).

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