

Creativity and innovation

At the start of this hearing there was a desire to inform Members of the European Parliament about an interesting initiative in the Czech Republic called *Česká hlava*, or 'Czech Mind'. This project has recently changed from a Czech initiative to a Europe-wide one. It aims to improve the standing and public recognition of eminent scientists, inventors and researchers. I particularly appreciate its focus on young people, fledgling scientists and researchers. Thanks to the friendly advice and initiative of colleagues from the Committee on Culture and Education and the Committee's secretariat, today's hearing has a distinctly international flavour.

It is an honour for me to welcome here today a number of interesting and eminent speakers who will tell us more about the issues surrounding creativity and innovation as viewed from different perspectives. These values will, particularly in 2009 in the European Union, repeatedly be at the forefront of our minds. This year has been declared Year of Creativity and Innovation by the European Union. There can be no doubt that human curiosity and the need to discover more and more about the world that surrounds us are among the essential elements of human nature. Thanks to its creativity and innovation, humankind has, over its long history, fashioned for itself the role of a kind of leader of this world. It is these very values that help us impart new dynamism to the global economy and which greatly help us to behave responsibly towards the environment.

Support for research and development was among our policy priorities as long ago as 2000, when the European Union adopted what is known as the Lisbon Strategy. We must therefore do all we can to find ways of providing a space for scientific initiatives by people of all ages. Our civilisation should also give science and development its proper place in our system of values. This should be expressed in the form of ensuring that successful scientists and inventors gain public recognition, as well as proper financial rewards. We cannot be satisfied with a situation in which science, research and development are areas where it is mainly positive deviants from the ranks of internally motivated researchers, stimulated above all by the thirst for knowledge, who succeed. As the President of the Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, once said, we should give serious thought to the fact that we reward our top sportsmen and women and popular artists so handsomely, while scientists and researchers lag some way behind. This strange hierarchy clearly also has an impact on the value systems of young people in our societies. Any initiative that seeks to alter this perverse arrangement of values should be welcomed and supported.

In our political practice, there is much talk of various kinds of support for research and development. In the European Parliament we have looked at this area again and again. I recall the recently established European Institute of Innovation and Technology, as well as the lengthy discussions on the seventh Framework Programme for science and research. I believe that, apart from financial support, what our research students need from their politicians above all is a significant contribution of that most precious of values – freedom. It is our duty always to provide free space for human invention and initiative, for new and original ideas and concepts to be put into practice. The greatest

advances in human history have not been achieved by changes to legislation, but precisely by the pioneering discoveries made in scientific laboratories. In my view, the role of politics is not to define particular research projects, but to provide sufficient opportunities for them to be carried out. Life today, and every day, presents us with more and more challenges, answers to which can be provided by fundamental scientific research not restricted by artificial barriers.

I do not think that our modest conference will change the world. However, I firmly believe that, together, we can give serious thought to these fundamental questions in particular:

- What should national governments and the European Union do to improve conditions for research and development?
- Can politicians do anything to intensify research and innovation activities in secondary and tertiary education?
- How can the process of putting the latest research findings into practice be made quicker and more effective?
- How can research and development be made more attractive to young people and promising scientists?
- How can the position of science, research and development in European citizens' value systems be improved?

JZ