

Joint article by Mr. Marek Belka, Prime Minister of Poland and Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Prime Minister of Denmark

Unofficial translation

4.11.2004.

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Four years ago the European Council adopted the Lisbon Strategy - the most important social and economic programme of the European Union. **Its overall goal is to turn Europe into the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by the year 2010.** We are now fast approaching the halfway mark and the midterm review of the strategy.

The accession of ten new member states has created a new situation for Europe. In our opinion it is an opportunity for the European Union which, if used properly, can give the Lisbon Strategy a greater momentum, as the whole Union can take advantage of the enormous human resources and economic potential of the new members.

Today, the Lisbon Strategy is overloaded with well-intended thematic reports with the result of an almost non-existing national debate. Overview and focus on the essential is lost, and so is the communication with those that should carry through the reforms. Only few know what the Lisbon Strategy is all about. Our main challenge today is how do we make the Strategy more efficient and more relevant for the way we actually handle reforms nationally.

Our answer is that we should on the one hand tailor the handling of the Lisbon strategy towards national development with easily understandable goals and recommendations, and on the other hand strengthen the Community's role in ensuring coherence and progress.

Based on national recommendations by the Commission, each Member State should draw up a single report – some would say a policy strategy – on how to progress towards growth and employment in the years to come, and how progress has been achieved so far. Moreover, it must be stressed that when the Commission evaluate progress, it should focus on the relative progress made by Member States. That would make it more rewarding for those that have a long way to go with reforms, but are making tremendous efforts.

Reorienting the focus of the Lisbon-Strategy to each Member States' specific situation would enhance parliamentary and societal debate. Creating a strong sense of national ownership behind the common reform strategy is essential for success.

Reorienting focus towards national reforms is not to say that we do not have common challenges. We do: Structural reforms, an ageing population, how to develop an advanced knowledge based society, how to manage reforms. These are common central challenges that should be the focus for discussion among heads of State and Government.

We also believe that Europe must take advantage of the midterm review and take concrete, determined and forward-looking initiatives especially with regard to research, innovation and education. We should orient our strengthened European efforts in research and development towards the creation of an internal market for knowledge. An internal market for knowledge would provide the necessary framework to provide direction for many of the existing activities and proposals to come in the field of research, innovation and education. An internal market for knowledge is an important step in achieving the overall goal of becoming the most dynamic knowledge society in the World. And would in turn stimulate growth and employment in all 25 Member States.

In our future efforts we should focus on stimulating competition among researchers and research institutions and removing barriers to mobility, and at the same time strengthen European research co-operation. One of the areas where strengthened co-operation could result in added value is basic research. Establishing a European basic research fund under a supervision of an European Research Council should enable the best researchers and research teams to carry out their work at the highest level.

Basic research has traditionally been a national domain and therefore has not allowed for sufficient competition and collaboration at European level. It is important to promote Europe to a leading position in those fields of research where the European science is particularly competent or where promising scientific developments substantiate it. Scientists from all Member States should have equal access to benefit from the research carried out. Research teams funded by the European Research Council should make every effort to offer training of scientists from all parts of the Union and ensure the dissemination of research results to academia and industry. This would lead to the improvement of the competitiveness of the EU and at the same time diminish the technological difference between old and new member states.

Secondly, the rules of participation in the Research Framework Programmes should be simplified and made more flexible. This would not only attract large and established research teams, but also emerging ones, as well as industrial entities, especially SMEs. Moreover one of the overall goals of the Programme should be the meaningful integration of the research environments of the enlarged Union. This would enable the effective use of the new member states' research potential. Research, innovation and education are important areas of the Lisbon Strategy that will have decisive impact on rapid improvement of the European Union's competitiveness. They are key to European growth, prosperity and new and better jobs.

Thirdly, mobilising human resources is crucial for the future status of research in Europe and their ability to match colleagues from the US and Asia. In this respect more people should be attracted to start careers in science. The 7th Framework Programme should therefore allocate e.g. extra funding to more PhD fellowships especially within areas, which would help to promote innovation and industrial applications. This funding should be equally accessible for researchers from old and new member states. In addition to this, a special scheme for young scientists from the new member states could be created.

The traditionally high standards of education and dynamism of young researchers from the new member states can provide a unique opportunity for the EU if we remove barriers to mobility across national borders. Efforts should be undertaken at the EU level to remove these obstacles in such a way as not to discriminate researchers from the new member states. The goal is joint and simple: more and better qualified researchers for the whole of Europe.

We are determined in our belief that in the longer-term enlargement will improve European growth and employment. Europe must take advantage of the mid-term review to revitalize and refocus the Lisbon strategy. We fully believe that the new President of the Commission will make full use of his powers to take Europe forward.

Marek Belka Prime - Minister of Poland Anders Fogh Rasmussen - Prime Minister of Denmark