

Check against delivery!



Commissioner Janez POTOČNIK

*First Stakeholders General Assembly
of the Fuel Cells and
Hydrogen Joint Undertaking*

Welcoming Address at Opening Plenary Session

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a pleasure for me to welcome you – from all over the world – to Autoworld here in Brussels.

I can't think of a more appropriate place for us to meet. I remember back in March 2005 as a relatively fresh-faced Research Commissioner, at the 2nd General Assembly of the Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Technology Platform, I drove a hydrogen fuel cell powered car.

Looking around at the fantastic selection from the history of the automobile around us, it strikes me that back then I was really in the car of the future. But now I'm addressing another vehicle that will really drive us into tomorrow. You are that vehicle.

Why do I say this? Because today represents a really important milestone for advancing the development and deployment of fuel cells and hydrogen technologies. I think we all have come to realize the potential role that fuel cells and hydrogen technologies can play in a future sustainable energy system. But, at the same time, there are immense technical and non-technical barriers that must yet be overcome to bring them to the point of commercial readiness.

These barriers exist, it is true, but we cannot stop trying to overcome them. Because the realities of the energy crises are a constant thorn in the world's side. We know that in Europe just as in the world at large, security of energy supply, climate change, maintaining economic growth and the urgent need to develop and introduce alternative sustainable energy systems are factors that drive us to do research, to legislate and strive towards finding better solutions. This quest is an integral part of our work in creating a European Research Area, the research 'arm' of the Lisbon Strategy and of its continuation through our Ljubljana process.

We are also committed to addressing these issues through other policy tools. One of these is the 'Energy Policy for Europe'. In particular, the European Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET-Plan) and the policies we are putting in place to meet the so called 'three 20s' objectives for 2020.

Fuel Cell and Hydrogen technologies will play a crucial role in the SET-Plan, especially so because the H2 JTI is actually a first working example of how some of the European Industrial Initiatives in this area could look like.

Worth mentioning here too is the recent support (agreement) of the European Parliament to the Commission's proposal for a Regulation to simplify the approval of hydrogen powered vehicles. Once it is adopted by the Council it will mark a real practical step forward in the development and marketing of clean and safe hydrogen vehicles.

I have likened the Joint Undertaking to a vehicle of the future – but where did you come from?

Just over two years ago, at the 3rd General Assembly of the European Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Technology Platform, I announced the plans for the Commission to launch the legal process for the establishment of a Joint Technology Initiative (JTI), funded from different FP7 Themes. Back then, the JTI was a 'new animal', born out of the hard work done in our EU institutions and helped by the Industry Grouping alongside other stakeholders. It took until May 2008 to complete the process – achieved at the adoption of the Regulation setting up the Fuel Cells and Hydrogen Joint Undertaking (JU).

This new JU shares the same *raison d'être* as the other JTIs: the objective of creating new partnerships between publicly and privately-funded organisations involved in research. They have been created to focus on areas where RTD can contribute to increasing European competitiveness and improving our quality of life. Within this objective, their main goal is to implement and coordinate RTD more efficiently, with industry taking a lead role in defining strategy, priorities and timelines, in consultation with the research community and with the European Commission.

Fuel cells and Hydrogen was one of the (initially six) selected areas, but the only JTI in the energy field. Making you a unique vehicle in a crucial area for the future of energy in Europe and for Europe's future well-being. That's the reason why you are so important and why your success is so crucial - because your structure is a model for future activities which aim to stimulate new energy technologies. You are the model of the future. If I may borrow from Henry Ford's famous quote - you can have any colour you like, as long as it's black – I can say today: You can have any JTI you like, as long as it's successful!

But what will constitute success for you?

Within six years, the JU will be expected to have speeded up the development of hydrogen supply and fuel cell technologies to the point of planned commercial launches for:

- early market applications, such as handheld devices, or portable generators by 2010;
- stationary applications (domestic and commercial Combined Heat and Power) by 2015; and
- for mass market roll-out of transport applications by 2020.

This ambitious roll-out does not come without a hefty price tag. We must not forget that the JU budget (of € 940 million) represents only a fraction of the resources necessary to get the technologies to market. And this will only be achieved through combined funding: from the JU, national and regional programmes (including the Structural Funds).

It's because of the need to diversify funding sources that the JTI's must do this – provide the leverage necessary to oil the wheels of research with money to keep it moving in the right direction. The levers are already being pulled and Member State and regional programmes are already benefiting. The German National Innovation Programme (NIP) and the French H2E programmes, or the recently announced Spanish National Research Centre, co-financed by the Spanish central government and by the Castilla La Mancha region are good illustrative examples to be followed by other EU Member States and Regions.

Substantial private funding will be necessary too, as well as the leverage provided by the new FP7 Risk-Sharing Finance Facility.

And assuming, as we do, that we will generate the money we need to achieve our aims, it will be a considerable achievement to manage it properly. This is why, in order to ensure the coordination and efficient management of funds, the FCH JU will be guided by the principles of transparency and openness, competitiveness and excellence, inclusiveness and close cooperation among stakeholders in order to achieve the best possible benefit for Europe. Its RTD activities will respect the fundamental and ethical principles applicable to FP7.

This is a day to celebrate, to record in our diaries, but this is only the beginning of our next phase.

Because, despite what some may think, the Fuel Cells and Hydrogen Joint Undertaking will not only focus on demonstration activities. This is not an area where all the research has been completed and we can march it to market neatly packaged and ready for the consumers. It will have to kick-start long term breakthrough-oriented research with the aim of achieving the **technological advances** necessary in several areas. Areas which include materials, reliability and durability and improved performance in the whole hydrogen and fuel cell supply chain, and in particular, sustainable hydrogen production and cost-efficient and safe storage.

It will also be standing on its own two feet in choosing who it cooperates with. From now on the JU will be responsible for its own strategy on co-operation at global level. Not just where it needs to tackle the main technical bottlenecks, but to harmonise safety, regulatory and assessment frameworks as well as strategic planning. Bearing this in mind, it is no coincidence that the Steering Committee of the **International Partnership for the Hydrogen Economy (IPHE)** is meeting in Brussels at the same time as our General Assembly. They are, in fact, here with us today at our launch and will be actively participating in later sessions. You are more than welcome.

I hope that this should result in new proposals for improving the way we coordinate and promote international cooperation. Only a few weeks ago, the Commission published a Communication calling for a strategic framework for international science and technology cooperation – one of the five initiatives adopted to take the ERA forward. This aims to further European research and European competitiveness in a globalised world, by strengthening international cooperation in science and technology through a stronger partnership between the EU and the Member States **and** with strategic partners.

There is much more I could say about our launch and about the new and exciting future for these potentially ground-breaking technologies. But I would like to end by saying something about external perception – the way in which we are viewed by the layman – because I think it's worth saying.

These are troubled financial times. Companies, governments and families are all tightening their belts and economising. We cannot ignore this. Fuel cell and hydrogen technologies are (and will be for a while) considerably more expensive than conventional ones. Now, they deliver “societal benefits” rather than added functionalities that would drive consumer demand. We have to avoid being labelled as luxury research which might be better carried out when times don't look so bleak.

This puts a responsibility on us to present the work we are doing especially carefully, because we need momentum, not inertia. We know just how success for us can change energy technology for ever, but we need to reach the layman with convincing messages. Messages which make these technologies acceptable and logical but without creating false expectations. The JU will have to tread very carefully in the future to achieve this.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is not an Oscar ceremony, but it is the time for me to finish with some due thanks to the people and organisations who have contributed to make this moment possible. It's a long list because it reflects the journey we've made to get here.

I'd like to thank former president Prodi, the late former Commissioner De Palacio and former Commissioner Busquin, the “High Level Group” who developed the "Vision" document, the European Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Technology Platform (particularly its two chairmen: Jeremy Bentham and Herbert Köhler) as well as its different bodies (including the “Strategic Research Agenda” and “Deployment Strategy” panels and the MS Mirror Group), the MEPs of the ITRE Group (specially Mrs. Locatelli, the Rapporteur of the proposal for the Regulation), the members of the Industry Grouping and the Research Grouping, the committed Regions and Municipalities which recently formed the HyRAMP partnership, and finally the main Commission Services involved (RTD, TREN and JRC).

I suggest, then, before **I** run out of energy, that we get on with the General Assembly. I hope that you are ready to participate enthusiastically in the sessions and in the social event! And please, don't forget to take a look at the exhibition and at the posters of EU funded projects – they are all worth the effort.