



Transcript of the
Opening Presentation
Workshop 'Towards European Co-ordination of Plant Genomics'
(Amsterdam, December 12, 2002)

Goals of the workshop against the background of a European Research Area (ERA)

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I like to welcome you on behalf of the Netherlands' Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Research and Science Department. Being a member of EU Science and Research Committee CREST for the Netherlands, I am happy that this meeting takes place. Especially that it takes place in the Netherlands, although in a rather international setting.

Luckily, in the programme it is foreseen that you see a bit more typical Dutch places. Unfortunately I can not join you then because of other obligations.

First of all, I like to thank Wouter Spek, Ellen de Waal, Marianne Slot and Marc Zabeau for their enthusiastic efforts to organise this meeting in a relatively short period. Monika Sormann of the Flemish Administration could not be here, but I want to stress the good Dutch - Flemish co-operation in this initiative.



It is good to see such a large number of interested people and a geographically fairly representative group is present, including some associated and candidate Member States.

That alone is a success, concerning the aim of networking!

Of course, the purpose of this meeting is to look ahead and to discover what possibilities and wishes exist concerning more European co-operation in plant genomics research.

Let us first look a little back at the 'historical' background of the request of my ministry to the Netherlands Genomics Initiative to organise this kick-off meeting. I don't want to go back as far back as first debates about this issue initiated by Spinneli in 1972 and Ruberti in 1994.

I have asked the organisers to send you (together with the programme) the conclusions of the Lisbon European Spring Council in 2000 and the informal meeting of industry and research ministers, in Gerona this year.



Let us first go back to 2000. EU Commissioner for Research Busquin presented a Communication called "Towards a European Research Area".

Consequently, the Lisbon Council asked the Council and the Commission, together with the Member States, "to develop appropriate mechanisms for networking national and joint research programmes on a voluntary basis around freely chosen objectives [..]".

The European Commission did so and made a proposal in the part of the Sixth Framework Programme called "Strengthening the foundations of the ERA", as adapted this year by the Council and European Parliament, and being the basis for the ERA-NET support scheme.



You will probably have discovered that conclusion number 7 of the combined meeting of industry and research ministers in February in Gerona is the relevant part for our meeting.

It states that the Ministers acknowledged the importance of the progressive mutual opening up of national research (and technology/innovation) programmes.

The report for this debate¹ was based on earlier work by CREST, more especially a report of the professor Gonzalo Leon².

1. *Potential Action lines on the process of progressive mutual opening up of national RTD programmes (January 2002).*
2. *Report on cross-border co-operation, sub-Committee of CREST, Brussel, 18 May 2000.*



With mutual opening up as an ultimate – and most complex - goal, CREST was considered as a useful "arena" to take action to increase

- information exchange **and**
- cross border co-operation **and to**
- establish the networking of both national policy makers **and managers of research and technology programmes.**

It was against this background that five areas

*Marine Sciences
Plant Genomics
Complex Systems
Chemistry
Astrophysics*

were chosen for the launch of pilot exercises with the objective of mutual learning on the appropriate mechanisms.



In the selection, promising areas were chosen, that were not covered by the concentration principle of FP6.

Specifically, for Plant Genomics the existence of several co-ordination activities in Europe like Génoplant and GABI was taken into consideration and of course the prospects of the development of Genomics for plant systems.

So if you are confused by the CREST initiative in relation to ERA-NET, you should realise that both are elements in a step by step approach towards the more ambitious goal of cross funding of open national programmes.

The organising committee has chosen for a mix concerning the background of participants.

As first of all, the situation differs from country to country.

Also it was not always known what was the involvement of the persons who were nominated by CREST in national plant genomics programmes.



Secondly, the involvement of scientific managers in this European initiative could also put bottom-up pressure on the political and policy level to reorganise national policies and programmes - or even set up new programmes - as contribution to the structuring of the European Research Area in the area of plant genomics.

Both levels need each other. However, keep in mind, to ERA-NET only "research activities" at national or regional level are eligible, and therefore not specific universities or faculties, unless they are mandated to implement a national programme.

In Rotterdam last tuesday the Dutch Sixth Framework Programme Starting Conference took place.

It was clear that high expectations exist concerning this plant genome initiative. Robert Jan Smits of the European Commission expressed his hope that this meeting in the end will lead to an ERA-NET initiative.



Just to remind you: the call will be published December 17 and close in June. A second call will be launched in March 2003 with no cut-off date.

I wish you a successful meeting and I am looking forward to hearing the conclusions tomorrow. Which - with your permission - I might report back to CREST at the next meeting on January 14, 2002.

I would now like to give the word to Marc Zabeau.