

**Address by Ms. Mary Harney T.D.
Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment
at the Launch of the Sixth EU Framework Programme
Dublin Castle 12 July, 2002.**

I am delighted to have this opportunity to address you at the opening of this conference on the European Union's 6th Research Framework Programme. Your presence here testifies to the importance of the Programme for the research community, for industry and for Ireland. I would like to extend a special welcome to Mr. Richard Escritt, Director, DG Research, and his Commission colleagues who are giving us their time in order to share their insights into the operations of the Programme.

I would like to say a special word of welcome to Andras Siegler, Under Secretary of State responsible for Research in the Hungarian Ministry of Education. He will be addressing you directly after lunch today regarding the opportunities for FP6 collaboration with Hungary. Hungary, as with the other Candidate Countries, is rich in talent and will bring welcome added strength and diversity to the enlarged European Union.

This Government truly recognises the importance of Science, Technology and Innovation to the future well being of the Irish and EU economies. I, as Tánaiste, have taken over direct responsibility for this area and I look forward to shaping policy and meeting the challenges we face over the coming years. I look forward to working closely with the Commission and the EU Council of Ministers to achieve the ambitious goal of creating a European Research Area and, as we all appreciate, the Framework Programme will play an important role in making this a reality.

This Conference is very timely following, as it does, the final adoption by the Council of Ministers last month of the structure, scientific and technological priorities and budget for the Framework Programme. The coming months will be important in finalising the detail of the Specific Programmes but in the meantime we must all become familiar with the wide ranging opportunities which will be available under FP6 so that we may participate from the start and apply our greatest resource, our intellectual capacity, to the research challenges of Europe and the modern world. Over the course of the day you will hear more on the opportunities from our distinguished speakers and I hope you will be inspired to join this great EU effort to tackle the greatest research challenges of our generation.

Ireland's emergence as Europe's high-growth economy has been a feature of the last decade. This transformation has arisen as a result of many factors, including a dynamic and youthful population; the pursuit of pragmatic and innovative government policies; openness to trade, not only in goods and services, but also in new ideas; and an emphasis on education and technological innovation.

The Government has been committed to getting the environment for business right and will continue with that commitment. However, we must accept there are many threats which we face. The less favourable external environment will test our competitiveness. Other pressures are arising from changes to the ways in which industry operates. We have seen a strong trend towards the movement of manufacturing towards lower cost economies. This reflects the fact that Ireland is no longer a low wage economy and must make that transition to higher added value products and services that allow us to sustain and grow incomes. A key part of this process is to recognise the importance of innovation in helping enterprises to move up the value chain and to create a flow of technology based firms capable of competing on export markets.

Many would describe the past decade as revolutionary in growing and transforming our economy, in making it competitive, in providing employment and creating wealth for the benefit of our people. We recognise that to stand still is to go backwards as others will progress. The next decade must be equally revolutionary. We must take the next step and move from the rhetoric to the reality of building a knowledge-based economy because this is where our future lies. Science, technology, research and innovation are the key words of the future. We must build the structures which support research excellence, we must enhance our ability to compete at the pinnacle of knowledge and produce the people through our educational system who will take on the new challenges. A cornerstone of this future is building our research capability in our universities, institutes and enterprises, in essence, the research infrastructure which will make it possible.

The Government is certainly playing its part and is committed to ensuring that there is a range of funding avenues open so as to avoid a highly prescriptive research policy. The Government recognises the need to support research across a wide and complex canvas, from curiosity driven research and research in the humanities and social sciences to industry and economically driven research. A key challenge for Ireland is to achieve a strong research base with effective links between higher education and industry and to centres of excellence both locally and overseas.

In recognition of the driving force of research, development and innovation, we are investing in the research base as never before. In the current National Development Plan, €2.5 billion has been allocated over seven years to Research, Technological Development and Innovation. The greater part of this funding will be aimed at developing research capability and excellence across the industry,

education, agriculture, food, marine and environment sectors. A separate funding stream provides for Health research.

Given the extent of our investment and its importance, the Government has asked the Irish Council for Science Technology and Innovation to establish a Commission to examine, with international experts and in consultation with all interested parties, our structures and mechanisms for the formulation and implementation of national policy for Research and Technological Development. I have been disappointed to see this initiative portrayed as one concerned with advancing the role or authority of various Departments or organisations or making funding decisions. On the contrary, the fundamental aim of the Commission is to deepen our understanding of the policy-making process across organisational boundaries so as to ensure the utmost co-ordination, linkages and most importantly, synergy across the sectors and activities. While respecting the diversity and complexity of the innovation process it is important that we have in place efficient and effective structures which reflect our national ambitions and interest.

Clearly I and my colleagues in Government believe that the creation of a world class Irish research system is fundamental to enhancing Ireland's competitive advantage and well-being. I also believe that the increased research capability which we are building will result in more and better participation in this Programme and future Framework Programmes. I would like to put that challenge to all of you as potential participants. Increase and grow your involvement with the Framework Programme. Collaborate with research institutions and enterprises across Europe with the FP6 brand of excellence in research. Government wishes to see these synergies developed and the leverage impact of our national investment on FP6 participation.

There is great coherence between our Irish ambitions and those of the European Union, although the scale of activity may differ. At the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, political leaders endorsed the European Research Area as a central component in achieving the strategic objective for the European Union “ to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”.

Ireland fully subscribes to the development of a European Research Area where Member States, the applicant countries and the Associated States co-operate closely and co-ordinate their activities to enhance the knowledge base within Europe and further improve the European innovation performance.

In knowledge-based economies, innovation through the effective use of our knowledge resources is the key to competitiveness, economic growth and sustainable employment. While performance differs between the Member States, it is obvious that the EU as a whole is lagging well behind our main trading partners in terms of investment in R&D. We fully support the EU target of 3% of GDP for Gross Expenditure on Research and Development by 2010 set out in the Commission’s report to the Barcelona European Council in March 2002. For many Member States, including Ireland, this will represent a challenging target.

The EU’s own research Framework Programme has been a crucially important source of funding to support the growth of the Irish research base, particularly in the third-level education sector. The number of people attending today’s conference is proof positive of the level of interest of the Irish research community in the Sixth Framework Programme, which is going to differ in many respects

from its predecessors. And I am heartened by this level of interest and hope it will translate into solid participation by Ireland in FP6.

The Sixth European Framework Programme for Research (FP6) is an essential part of the Lisbon economic reform agenda. It represents one of the largest expenditures in the EU, with a budget of over €6 billion over 4 years. The Government is pleased to see that the final agreement focuses European level research towards those areas essential for European competitiveness and increasing resources for researcher mobility. The bulk of Community money will be spent on supporting research in a small number of crucial areas which will be key to the EU's ability to compete on the world stage in the coming years. Science has become a global endeavour and international collaboration is commonplace. If Europe is to compete successfully with the US and Japan, it is absolutely essential that the Sixth Framework Programme aims to create critical mass across the EU in key frontier technologies – such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, information technology and cleaner energy technologies.

The Irish approach to FP6 can be set in the context of previous Framework Programmes and in the massive investment in research started under this Government's previous term in office. During the period of the early Frameworks from 1988, Irish companies and universities seeking research support welcomed this European initiative energetically. The benefits to Ireland were substantial not merely in terms of funds, but in the retention of skilled personnel within Ireland, the development of research teams of significant size and the forging of hundreds of research and business linkages across Europe.

There is no doubt that Irish participation in Framework programmes has provided essential funding and collaboration which has contributed to the creation of a workforce capable of acting as a magnet to attract and retain high technology

companies. Framework participation has also enhanced the credibility and reputation of the Irish research community and considerably increased its visibility on a European and world stage.

I can say that to a large extent the research activity generated in Ireland under previous Framework Programmes has laid the foundation for the large new investment by Government in recent years.

Here in Ireland, we have a particular opportunity to create synergies between national research initiatives and the Sixth Framework Programme as the thematic areas align with key research priorities across all sectors. Of the 33 Research Centres funded under the HEA's Programme for Research in the Third Level Institutes, a significant proportion carry out research on themes directly aligned with the thematic priority areas in FP6. Many of these centres are themselves collaborating and clusters of research activity are emerging around key technology areas. The investments by Science Foundation Ireland building research excellence by supporting world-class Irish and international scientists and building collaborative internationally competitive research centres will give Ireland particular strengths in strategic technologies, particularly in niche areas underpinning Information and Communication Technologies and Biotechnology. There are opportunities for Irish researchers within these centres to become involved in Networks of Excellence on a European scale and many of them are well placed to become strategic partners with similar organisational clusters in other countries.

Today is just the start of a process which will inform and support participation. The state agencies for industrial development as well as specialised agencies in areas such as marine, health, and energy will assist Irish organisations participate in the various themes and horizontal activities.

In particular, I am pleased to announce that Enterprise Ireland, as well as providing the assistance of staff experienced in previous Framework Programmes has set up a dedicated unit to provide a National Information & Support Service to potential participants. This national service will act as a first point of contact for queries relating to FP6. It will disseminate information and will work in cooperation with the national representatives for the various specific areas of FP6. It will also participate in the Europe wide network of National Contact Points providing a mechanism for identifying partners in other countries with whom Irish organisations can collaborate.

In addition, Enterprise Ireland will offer financial support to companies to assist in the preparation of proposals prior to submission and is making available travel support to third level researchers seeking research partners in other member states, again prior to proposal submission. I expect that the combination of financial support, mentoring, promotion and advice, which this new Unit will provide, will result in an active participation by Irish organisations in Framework 6.

As I said at the outset, the Government is committed to the development of a European Research Area and to the development of a knowledge based economy, capable of sustaining economic growth and more and better quality jobs. I believe our success in meeting these challenges will depend on our ability to cooperate and share knowledge for our mutual benefit and well-being and this is the very basis upon which the Framework Programme is built.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to finish by thanking the organisers of today's event and the Commission for providing us with such a strong team to answer all your questions. Most especially, I wish to thank all of you who have come here

today to find out about this Programme and in whose hands the success of the 6th Frame work Programme lies.
