

Minister Stefan Wallin
Europacat VIII, 26.8.2007, Turku

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen

I take great pleasure in welcoming you to the EUROPACAT VIII conference. This is the first time that this firmly established European conference is organised by the Nordic countries. I am particularly delighted that Turku has been chosen as the venue of this gathering and I can welcome you to my home town.

Turku is an old city of culture and academia. Turku was the first capital of Finland. The Archbishop has his seat here, and it was in Turku that the first Finnish university, the Academy of Turku, was established in 1640. Turku is a soundly international city bordering the Baltic Sea. Throughout history, the sea has provided routes to the outside world and to international contacts. The fact that Turku has been chosen to host this conference also shows that it is an important seat of catalysis research and relevant business.

Our international competitiveness rests solidly on knowledge and a high level of education. Many national and international studies show that Finland's long-term investment in research, education and innovation has been a key asset in international competition. In a recent league table published by the European Union, Finland was rated as one of the leading innovation countries. Finnish research also fares well in OECD comparisons.

The learning outcome of young Finns has attracted positive attention internationally. Finnish students rated high in the most recent survey undertaken within the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment. In literacy, Finns were clearly unsurpassed, and their learning outcome was among the best in natural sciences and mathematics.

This provides a fairly solid basis for the newly-appointed Government to further promote research and scholarship in Finland. The Government Programme contains certain important policy lines for further stepping up research and innovation. We have seen it imperative to renew in depth the research and higher education system. Many actions are already underway.

As we see it, at the core of structural development in the whole system is a more efficient use of resources. Synergy is sought in various forms of cooperation. One such form is a system of strategic centres of excellence, which target limited resources to spearhead fields. For them to succeed, it is important that universities, research institutes and businesses cooperate effectively. The partners commit themselves to collaborating on a longer term than usual, anticipating societal and business needs five to ten years ahead. These clusters of knowledge and know-how allow universities, research institutes and businesses to implement a jointly agreed research plan in their chosen fields. The strategic centres of excellence combine the production of quality knowledge with its application and with researcher training. Such a centre can successfully

bring off a close union of theory and practice, which is also a leading theme at this conference.

Finland has succeeded in combining first-rate economic development with balanced development of society and the environment. The development of the research system and targeted increases in research input will continue to be crucial factors for economic growth, employment and welfare. It is only by creating new, strong and efficient knowledge-based production that we can generate new jobs. Our starting point is the notion that increased productivity can only be built on the utilisation of new ideas and on new technologies.

Various projections indicate that investment in education brings value for money both for the individual and for society. There are no indications that research and development, education or the innovation system would lose any of their significance in determining economic success, quite the contrary.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Internationalisation remains a major challenge for the Finnish higher education and research system. Although universities, research institutes and businesses have clearly increased their international research activities over the past ten years, the situation cannot be deemed good as yet. We need more world-class talent from abroad as well as domestic talent.

Research and technology are globalising at an accelerating pace. New major powers are emerging in science and technology. In view of this, we have made systematic input into activating Finnish research units and businesses to network internationally. The European Research Area is an important frame of reference for us in international activities. We strive to improve the prerequisites of research in Europe by coordinating EU and national research activities and policies and by funding joint initiatives.

Having said that, I would like to stress the importance of sustainable development as the underpinning for all action. Economic development cannot be accomplished at the cost of our environment and our nature. A good reminder of the vulnerability of nature here in Turku is the Baltic Sea and its current state. Climatic change is one of the foremost challenges for us today and it concerns all those who inhabit our globe. Research is a critical component in our effort to solve this problem.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Your theme "From theory to industrial practice" is truly topical and apposite. This European conference jointly arranged by the Nordic countries has a strong global character. The environment in which research and the economy operate is changing, globalising and networking.

It is true that information and communications technologies open new channels for cooperation, but there's no doubt that the best contacts and encounters are those that take place face to face. This conference offers an excellent setting for such encounters. Its comprehensive scientific programme and exhibition generate new

ideas, discussions and networking — not forgetting the pivotal role of the social programme in gatherings like this.

I wish you all the best in your conference and sunny days here in Turku.