SPEECH/08

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Opening Speech for the 2nd Nanotechnology "Safety for Success" Dialogue

Second Annual Nanotechnology "Safety for Success" Dialogue Workshop

Brussels, 2-3 October 2008

Dear Commissioner Vassiliou,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction: Nanotechnology: an important issue in which EC is involved since 2004

I am very pleased, as a representative of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, to open together with Ms Androulla Vassiliou, the Second Annual Nanotechnology “Safety for Success” Dialogue Workshop.

This workshop addresses an important issue tackled by the European Commission, since 2004. I would like to thank the Commission, in particular the Directorate General for Health and Consumers, for arranging for a second year, a dialogue between all the stakeholders in order to achieve the goal of a safe approach for the responsible development of nanotechnologies. The French presidency fully supports this event. It is essential to exchange regularly at the EU level, information about the state of art of nanotechnologies safety.

Discussions will focus on the consumer health aspects of chemical products, medicines, consumer products and food, keeping in mind the need to ensure the safety and the success of these new technologies.

Economic aspects which hold great significance:

Nanomaterials present an enormous potential in various fields such as health care, information technologies, energy, production, security and aerospace. The market is growing very quickly and presence of nanotechnology becomes a reality in our daily life. Indeed, 800 products have been referenced in an international data base. More than 2000 nanomaterials were put on the market, and billions of dollars in revenue are expected from nanotechnology at the international level. The new phenomenon consists of the huge development, at nanoscale, of non conventional particles which are manufactured for specific properties with as much as behaviours as applications. At present, nanotechnology remains difficult to circumvent: some nanoparticles are already being produced and have been incorporated in nanoproducts for many years with production levels of hundreds of thousand of tons.

Health security and real governance for public acceptance:

It appears important to reassure the public, taking into account the uncertainties emerging from the rapidly growing number of new applications of nanotechnologies which involve dissemination of nanoparticles during all the cycle of life in environment and body. This means of course that one should be able to know exactly where they are and what the risks are for public health in both terms of hazards and exposures. Indeed, health security is at the heart of preoccupations of EU citizens who tend to react with a certain degree of intolerance to risk. Major health sources have been in the forefront of citizens' concerns for several decades, in particular for chemical products: Seveso, mesothelioma form asbestos…. It is important for competent authorities to check that health, occupational, and environmental safety aspects are being considered and addressed in order to avoid threats to safety and to foster public acceptance of innovations involving nanomaterials. Moreover, it would be difficult for EU citizens to understand why, within the EU, competent authorities from border countries might make different decisions (e.g. preventive measures...) in response to the same threat. Indeed, it remains crucial to have a coherent approach in Europe and at the international level and to encourage synergies and cooperation between all the stakeholders, namely, the EU Members States, EU Institutions, academics, research world, companies, funding organisations, NGOs and society in general in order to be successful in

building adequate governance, in ensuring an adequate implementation of existing regulation, and, when needed, in amending regulation or completing it. In addition, from competitiveness' point of view, Europe is in a favourable position as regards the numbers of brevets and scientific publications. Encouraging risk management in this field can help consolidating its position in the world as a part of a responsible development that is fully integrated.

EC Research is crucial, as is EC international cooperation

We recognise the efforts accomplished in the EU for Research in the field of nanomaterials and especially with respect to funding dedicated to safety Research. We can be proud that the EU is doing twice as well as the United States in this domain. Yet, we should not become complacent. This effort should be maintained and stepped up in order to quickly produce data for risk assessment. Moreover, the publication, in February of this year, of the Commission recommendation for a code of conduct on responsible research on nanoscience and nanotechnologies did not go unnoticed. I wish to emphasise the crucial and pressing need for research on health, safety and environment, bearing in mind the behaviours of particles at a nanoscale and the associated difficulty of characterising their physical and chemical properties: distribution of size, shape, surface energy; environment reactivity, stability…. In addition, the development of relevant, validate methods becomes a priority in order to correctly identify nanomaterials before carrying out any toxicity study. For the latter type of study, the priority appears clearly for toxicological tests, to consider all the routes of administration (inhalation, oral ingestion, dermal and parenteral routes) in order to take into account all the cycle of life and in particular, regarding the lack of publications for oral ingestion. If the inhalation route is definitively considered as the first source of exposure, we can barely forget that 80% of what is inhaled is swallowed, after cleaning process of the lungs by the mucocillar lift mechanisms. Furthermore, physics, chemistry and toxicology researchers should then work together for providing reliable data for a risk management. To achieve all these goals, it becomes strictly necessary that Commission continue in the same line and support the international cooperation of the EU with OECD, CEN, and ISO groups and, possibly, if appropriate, engage discussions in other fora like the Codex Alimentarius Commission established by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization.

Basis of regulation are in place but guidance could be provided

Considering the REACH regulation for chemical products and different other regulations for food, cosmetics or medicine, one should notice that these products could not be put on the market without a safety assessment. The main problem concerns how to consider specifically the safety of those products that contain nanomaterials. Because of their new properties, new hazards could appear. It remains crucial to identify these products, to make all the hazards data available and to assess public, workers', and environmental exposure, in order to perform a complete risk assessment. In this context, we note with interest the Communication by the Commission dated June 2008, about regulatory aspects for nanomaterials and especially regarding chemicals. I hope that discussions during these two days will contribute to the more official ones that will take place at the December meeting of the REACH Competent Authorities ad hoc group on nanomaterials, following the first meeting that was held last July.

I sincerely wish you a very productive conference, one that will support the safe, integrated, and responsible development of nanotechnologies. More specifically, it is my hope that you will not only be able to advance our thinking through the lively exchange of information and the significant brainstorming that should take place, but also to develop consensus positions on some of the key issues that characterize the different fields of applications of nanoscience and nanotechnologies.

Now let me invite Professor Bridges to chair the opening session about risk assessment

"What can the EU do to promote mental health of older people"

Summary of the presentation by Anne-Sophie Parent, Director, AGE-the European Older People's Platform, 13 June 2008

Various factors make older people more vulnerable to mental health problems:

- The physiological ageing process which results in an increasing risk of dementia (increased risk both for the ageing individual and partner/carer)
- Adverse effect of overmedication and polypharmacy among the elderly
- Drug-alcohol interaction
- Increasing dependency which results in an increased risk of elder abuse
- The isolation and social exclusion faced by an increasing number of older people today due to modern lifestyles
- Abrupt change from employment to long term unemployment of (early)-retirement (losing sense of purpose in life)
- Lack of professional training in geriatric and gerontology
- Lack of training and support for informal carers
- The gender dimension: very older women are at higher risk

AGE welcomes the EU Pact on Mental Health and commits itself to support all actions implemented to promote better mental health for all.

As part of the Pact on Mental Health, Member States should agree to commit themselves to increase the number of Healthy Life Years by one year in 2013. This would encourage them to adopt a holistic approach to healthy ageing, including the promotion of good mental health in old age.

If the EU is to "foster good health in an ageing Europe" in the period 2008-2013, it should address each of these factors that affect older people's mental health. In addition to the recommendations listed in the policy brief, EU action is needed in the following fields and the Pact should include to use existing EU instruments to:

FP7:

- Research on old age dementia cause, treatment and prevention. Research should also cover the social and financial impact of old age dementia. (FP 7)
- Research on medication use for the elderly: EMEA should set up a "Geriatric Committee" similar to the "Pediatric Committee" to analyse effect of medication on the elderly, including polypharmacy and overmedication, and share information across the EU with healthcare professionals.

- Raise awareness of care professionals and older citizens/informal carers of potential interaction between medication and alcohol (a problem often overlooked in older people)

OMC Social Protection/Social Inclusion

- Social exclusion of the elderly both in urban and rural/remote areas and examples of good practice across the EU
- EU Strategy to fight against elder abuse: the EU should develop quality guidelines for long term care to help prevent elder abuse (OMC on Social Protection and Social Inclusion)

ESF and Lisbon Strategy:

- Promote active ageing and a more positive of ageing workers;
- Promote health and safety at work including stress reduction;
- Promote more flexible retirement and early preparation for retirement (ESF and Lisbon Strategy)

Health Strategy and Grundvig programme

- Develop geriatric/gerontology training at EU level as exist for paediatrics