Closing remarks of the conference on Agricultural research in the ERA
Versailles, 5-6 December, 2000 by the Swedish State Secretary for Higher
Education and Research Dr. Agneta Bladh.

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honoured and pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this
conference on the role and future prospects of agricultural research in the ERA.
The outcome of this conference is very important to bring the aspects and
special circumstances of agricultural research into the implementation of a true
European area of research. Agricultural research plays an important role in many
of the challenges and goals of the European Union today.

The conditions of the agricultural sector have undergone tremendous changes
during the last decades. Researchers in the agricultural sector have been forced
to address a broader, increasingly complex, set of questions as focus has been
extended from rationalisation and increase of production to also include
increasing awareness of environmental issue, food safety and ethically sound
animal production. Development which is ecologically, economically as well as
socially sustainable has become a goal for Sweden as well as for the entire
European Union. Here, I would like to refer to the Council strategy on the
environmental integration and sustainable development in the Common
Agricultural Policy, which was agreed on at the Helsinki Summit in 1999. It is a
true challenge for scientists to combine the three objectives of sustainable
development.

Challenges for the agricultural sector include the demands from policy makers,
consumers and industry for
• Access to ethically sound, low-cost, safe and healthy food,
• An agricultural sector than not only delivers food, but also raw materials to other sectors, such as energy, material, chemistry and the pharmaceutical industries.
• Reduced strain on the basic ecological functions: a clean air, clean water and biodiversity.
• Resolution of possible conflicts of interest between the use of the landscape for tourism and traditional agricultural forestry production. At the same time the sector carries responsibility for rural development. The sector plays an important role by creating new sources of income and employment and protecting the rural heritage.

These challenges are largely the same for the whole of Europe and thus the importance of this conference is clear. Sweden, just like the other member states, is dependent on international decisions, not least within the EU. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) underlines the importance of the coordination of European research efforts within the agricultural field.

Let me now turn to the ERA initiative. The Document ”Towards a European Area for research” addresses many of the challenges for European research today. It has already considerably broadened and stimulated the debate on European research. Thank you for this Mr. Busquin.

Many of the ideas developed in the ERA are relevant to agricultural research. In line with the principles of subsidiarity and European added value it is obvious, in the view of my Government, that agricultural research has an important role
in addressing many common problems within the Union, and contributes to the achievement of many of the common objectives within the European Union.

It is our firm belief that the realization of a true European area of research is one way of strengthening the European research system through cooperation between the member states, and the candidate states.

However, it’s Sweden’s opinion that the realisation of the ERA should be based on the open and voluntary cooperation between the member states. However, each member state, should develop its own national policy concerning research.

This said Sweden welcomes the possibilities to transfer some of the initiatives and ideas presented in the ERA further along into the preparations for the 6th framework programme for research. It is our belief that the 6th framework programme should be the main instrument for the implementation of the ERA-project.

The possibilities of the framework programme to create an incentive for, and support to, cooperation between states through exchange of information, benchmarking and creation of networks between national research programmes are examples of such ideas that should be carried through from the ERA into the 6th framework programme. Another way of strengthening European research is the development of the methodology to identify (centres of) excellence. We especially welcome the initiatives to further promote mobility of researchers.

To realize a true European area for research, the organisation of the framework programme will have to undergo a substantial reorganisation towards

- increased concentration of the actions,
- increased resources for mobility
• and increased efforts towards a strengthening of the infrastructure in an European perspective.

In order to include these new ideas in the framework programme the present system with relatively short-term projects of limited size has to change towards a system with focused, more long-term programmes with a wider perspective.

We welcome these ideas of reforming the framework programme, but we would like to stress that the focus should remain clearly set on quality of the research and with sufficient room for fundamental research, as long as it is in line with the subsidiarity principle. A lot of the agricultural research is of a fundamental character, but likewise readily applicable. Fundamental research on prions was for example necessary to understand the mad cow disease (BSE).

We also find it necessary that the 6th framework programme is characterized by transparency, sufficient influence of researchers, as well as reduced bureaucracy.

Furthermore, we think the work with the 6th framework programme should be characterized by openness towards global cooperation, outside the European Union. This is not least very important for agricultural research. A great deal of the results of research may also be implemented in developing countries.

We are impressed with the progress towards the implementation of a true European area for research that has been achieved during the French Presidency, and it is our expectation that we shall be able to further develop the ideas of the ERA and start the discussions on the 6th framework programme during the Swedish Presidency. It is our ambition that the member states should take some steps towards a common position during the Swedish Presidency.
Finally, a few words about the upcoming Swedish presidency. Research in general, but also agricultural research, plays a role in all three top priorities of the Swedish presidency; Enlargement, Employment and Environment.

**Enlargement** of the European Union presents a historic opportunity to unite a continent that has been divided for too many years. The enlargement is a historic challenge: it means forging bonds between the east and west, laying a stable foundation for lasting development, peace and democracy in Europe.

The enlargement of the EU from 15 nations to perhaps twice as many would bring political, economical, environmental, cultural and social benefits to all countries in Europe. Research is already the precursor of the enlargement of the EU in as much as the framework programme is open to candidate states and, thus, plays an important role in involving the candidate states in the work of the EU.

Agricultural research has also large implications to the enlargement of the EU, as the enlargement of the union goes hand in hand with the development of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Our goal is to achieve significant advances in the process of enlargement of the EU during the Swedish Presidency.

**Employment**: the second "E"
At the beginning of 1994, 11 percent of the work-force within the EU were out of work. Since then, the situation has improved, and unemployment has dropped to 8 percent.

In the conclusions from the Lisbon Summit the leaders stated that a new strategic goal for next decade would be: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and a greater social cohesion. With this statement education and research was moved right into the centre of attention in the political debate. The creation of a competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy must include many measures related to research. The food industry is an important part of the economy. The creation of a new knowledge will contribute to an increased competitiveness of European agribusiness. The knowledgebase and the support of innovation in the food industry are increasing as the degree of processing is increasing, just as the consumer demand of the access of low-cost, safe and healthy food.

Environmental issues and the pursuit of sustainable development have been high-priority areas ever since Sweden joined the EU. We must work together, in Europe as well as with the rest of the world, for the environment, as environmental problems do not stop at borders. The EU has demonstrated that countries acting together can achieve a change.

Education and research play a key role in guaranteeing a long-term perspective on sustainable development. Research takes also the centre stage in developing the sustainable systems of the future as well as in providing the necessary knowledgebase for the solution of global environmental problems and, for political decisions. In many areas, not least within the agricultural sector, is an
adaptation to ecologically sustainable systems dependent of research and development of new techniques.

The Gothenburg Summit in June next year will be a unique occasion for Sweden to put sustainable development high on the agenda for the European Union. Sustainability is really about the future, we must vitalise and modernise our societies in a way that means that the globe can carry us all.

The importance of the agricultural research in a distinctly European perspective is beyond doubt. This conference has filled an important role in providing a platform to thoroughly discuss the role of agricultural research, and strategies to meet the many challenges of today. Thank you for a very enjoyable and stimulating conference.

Thank you for your attention.