



Commissioner Janez POTOČNIK

## ***Biorefineries – new generation***

*Info Day on the Biorefinery Joint Call*

*Brussels – Albert Borschette Conference Centre  
16 September 2008*

Ladies and Gentlemen

On 16<sup>th</sup> September 1620, exactly 388 years ago to the day, a ship called the Mayflower left Plymouth, on the South-West coast of England, with 102 people on board. The Mayflower was headed for Virginia: the rest, as they say, is history.

Of course, those on board the Mayflower were not the first to settle in America, nor would they be the last. They were however united by the ambition to make something better for themselves. It took time, of course, but it happened.

So, sometimes when the conditions are right, being bold and ambitious can pay off. And our ambition for biorefineries is the reason we are here today. We are asking for your ambition and boldness too and we hope that we're making the conditions right.

We certainly have something to aim at if we are needed a target for our ambition: the reduction of Greenhouse Gas emissions by 20% and target for 20% of the European Union's overall energy supply to come from renewable sources by 2020. These are ambitious targets. Our work must match them.

But why biorefineries? Because they could be the answer to a lot of sustainability prayers. Despite sharing the name with traditional oil-based refinery systems, biorefineries are much more. Facilities that can combine biomass conversion processes and equipment to generate fuels, power and new materials. Biorefineries have to be viewed in the wider context of the fight against global warming, the increase in oil prices and the EU's dependence on external energy supplies.

So how do we sell the idea of biorefineries as life changing technology? We must tread carefully. After all, biofuels have had a bad press recently. But to release the potential of the biorefinery idea, we need to fully grasp and embrace its complexity. We also need results. And to achieve these, we need to work closely together to foster better coordination and coherence of policy. This is why we have had to be innovative with our joint call. It is a real joint call, not a bi-lateral effort where innovation might be duplicated and potentially diluted. It is a widely integrated approach involving four research themes under FP7 and two of the Commission's Directorates General (RTD and TREN). This kind of coverage is needed to reach the wide and diverse community which might be interested in biorefinery projects and to get the best potential candidates and consortia together.

The call is split into two topics areas:

- Sustainable biorefineries; and

- Enhancing exchange of information, synergies and cross-fertilization between projects in the field of biorefineries

The idea of sustainable biorefineries is compelling both politically and from the research point of view. Biorefineries have been described as the backbone of knowledge based bio-economy. It's a fitting epithet. As well as the benefits in terms of renewable energy and fuels, they will contribute to the aims of our Lisbon strategy to improve European competitiveness and wealth. We want you to show us how biorefineries will supply a wide range of bio-based products and energy in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable way. But we also want to benefit from the development of the biorefinery model, which if fully developed could provide a real shot in the arm for the European economy with new competences, jobs and markets.

These ideas are at the very heart of our European Research Area and the Ljubljana process – the recent initiative for moving ERA forward – and in our recently published plans to encourage Member States to plan their research strategies together. We want to create the right conditions so that over time, using a combination of competition and cooperation we can create a pattern of world-class research expertise. We need collaborative, cross-disciplinary research within Europe and beyond its borders to achieve this. And this is as true for Biorefineries as elsewhere.

We need better information exchange too if we are going to make biorefineries work. We can't pull our punches here, because we need the right people to get work together to make it happen. How can anything be achieved if we don't significantly enhance cooperation between the worlds of research and industry? The information that we have already on biorefineries – whether it comes from commercial or academic sources must be identified, pooled and used. So, we will need the full participation of all relevant actors - both public and private.

Not only this, but we have to better prepare the business environment for biorefineries. The budget we have allocated for the call is not small at €57 million, but we will want to attract innovators and risk capital investment. Use this day – particularly the brokerage events which follow this afternoon to find potential consortia members.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We only have a day, so I'm going to stop talking now and let you do what you need to do. Let's not waste this opportunity to talk, exchange ideas and make contacts. After all, this is what we are here for.

Remember that boldness is our asset – just as the founding fathers found out. We cannot run the risk of limiting our vision and not further exploiting the potential for biorefineries. We've got a lot of new generating to do.