

The vision of a "knowledge society" cannot be achieved without identifying and promoting female talent in science and research, and raising expectations and ambitions of what women can achieve. (Prof. Renate Loll, Maastricht, 4 Oct 2007)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

where is our country headed, as part of Europe and the world at large?

We seem to have made our choice: instead of a Disneyland with windmills for visiting Asian tourists, we aspire to be an internationally competitive "knowledge-based economy", at the forefront of scientific and technological development, and dreaming of the (paying) Chinese students that will one day flock to our universities.

Alas: Where are all the highly educated people to carry this vision forward? Where are the centres of excellence in teaching and research that radiate far beyond our borders? How are we going to produce, attract and retain the most educated and creative minds?

There is a recognition in politics that we currently lack the highly skilled human resources required to realize these ambitions, in terms of numbers *and* providing leadership.

The numbers speak a clear language: it's the women who are missing! If only we could draw in *all* of our talent to contribute in full, especially in key sectors of science and technology, a large part of the problem would be solved.

I say: Women, this is your moment! Grasp the opportunity!

In doing this, we must address deep-seated structural issues that hamper the advance of talent and top-talent, of which the severe under-representation of women in full-time employment and in positions of power and influence is symptomatic.

Parents: Believe in your girls and their innate abilities, nurture their ambitions and teach them to believe in themselves! Tell them that "the sky is the limit"!

Mothers: Never ever say to your daughters again: "I was always terrible at maths and physics", as if this was a law of nature.

Women: Re-examine your own ambitions! Don't let yourselves be discouraged! With an adequate support system, it *is* perfectly possible to combine a full professional and family life. And nothing predisposes you to *not* excel in terms of your intellectual capabilities.

Universities: Prevailing 'informal decision-making' disadvantages women and other minority groups. Lay down transparent rules for recruiting, promoting and retaining scientists, *and* enforce them! Entrust young and talented researchers with financial and scientific independence.

Scientists: Explain that there are many ways to be an excellent scientist! Give the public a sense of the inspiration, creativity and satisfaction of contributing to solving society's problems.

Politicians: Put your money where your mouth is! Invest in education and research, *and* in new top institutions, but make your support conditional on the following of best practices which allow for a broad-based identification and promotion of talent, without gender bias.

To all: Talent and excellence in science and research don't just exist per se, they depend critically on a supportive environment.

Raise your expectations and ambitions of what girls and women are able to achieve! What is good for women is good for us all!