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Minister of the Ecology and Sustainable
Development

Opening Address to
the General Assembly
of the European Construction Technology Platform

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

Mr. Michel COTE,
President of the High Level Group of the Technology Platform,

Mr. Jesus RODRIGUEZ,
President of the Support Group of the Technology Platform,

Mr. Alain MAUGARD,
President of the Scientific and Technical Building Centre,

It is a pleasure to be among you this morning to inaugurate the general meeting of the European Technology Construction Platform.

Pleasure, yes, and also a great interest in your activities.

Every day, ecology and construction work in common fields. I believe it is crucial to reinforce our relations and I hope my presence here today bears witness to my commitment to this end.

Your technology platform is part of the European Union's 7th Framework Programme for Research and Development, which is of particular interest to me.

Indeed, research is essential in the fields of ecology and sustainable development, perhaps more than in any other field.

We must constantly improve our knowledge and know-how in order to implement effective policies.

I have therefore followed the activities of the "Environment and Sustainable Development" Group with interest.

The objective of your technology platform is to raise the construction industry to international standards of performance and competitiveness, while focusing on sustainable development.

I am pleased to encourage this approach and the presence of many French corporations here is very gratifying.

I am also pleased that the CSTB, our Centre for Scientific and Technological Buildings, acts as secretary for your platform.

The objective of this centre is indeed to improve the well-being and safety of buildings and their environment. Its principal priorities are health, safety and sustainable development.

These priorities run in parallel to the objectives of your platform, and are also central to my endeavours.

In fact, I am extremely pleased with the current collaboration between the CSTB and my Ministry.

I have had occasion to meet the centre's president, Mr. MAUGARD, with regard to topics such as high environmental quality and I am pleased to see him here today.

Returning to your Platform, the title of your vision for 2030 is "Challenges and Objectives for Europe's Built Environment" and this reflects your objectives.

To contribute to the success of Kyoto, protect natural resources, improve the urban environment, and optimize the lifecycle of the built environment: these are very ambitious objectives, which I fully support.

Among these objectives, one is essential and a specific focus of your general assembly: energy efficiency in buildings.

This topic has been of particular interest to me since I became Minister and I am pleased to see that it is a focal point of this meeting.

It is a fact that the construction industry is the second producer of greenhouse gases, after the transportation industry.

Heating our buildings represents 18% of direct greenhouse gas emissions. If one adds indirect emissions, such as those caused by urban heating or electricity, the construction industry represents 25% of all CO₂ emissions.

Finally, it is important to remember that buildings represent more than 45% of energy consumption in France.

These figures demonstrate that much can be done to improve this scenario within the construction industry.

For this reason, I have launched multiple concrete projects and the update of the 2004-2012 Climate Plan proposes new measures.

The first priority in my policy was to establish clear objectives related both to new housing and older buildings.

The law on the programming and orientation of the energy policy of July 13, 2005 is very ambitious for the construction sector, as it sets out precise objectives in terms of reducing energy consumption. This is not the case for the transportation sector, for example.

The law provides for reinforcement of regulations and standards every five years in order to improve energy performance in new and existing buildings.

Furthermore, this law is a perfect Factor 4 example as its objective is to divide by 4 greenhouse gas emissions caused by our building inventory by 2050.

Finally, it sets particularly ambitious objectives for new buildings: 40% less energy consumption by 2020.

After having established these clear and ambitious objectives, we needed to find the means to achieve them!

I am pleased today to observe that the construction industry has established a comprehensive plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: with regulatory measures, tax incentives and better use of carbon.

The European Directive of December 2002 related to the energy performance of buildings established clear objectives, which I have endeavoured to exceed.

The regulations on major renovations provided by the Directive are already in place. However, I wanted to go further and, before the first quarter of 2007, a decree will be enacted to regulate all renovations by imposing, for example, minimum performance requirements for buildings.

Another example is the energy diagnosis now required for all buildings on the market and which has been in effect since November 1.

In this regard, I decided purchasers should be informed not only on the energy performance of the premises, but also, and more specifically, on their CO² gas emissions. Again, this goes beyond the Directive requirements.

In parallel to these regulatory measures, I have established tax incentives. I am aware that a frequent objection is the additional cost incurred when choosing energy efficient energy.

I do not deny that the investment is more costly, however I remain convinced that it is rapidly compensated by a reduction in energy consumption.

However, in my battle to encourage citizens to increase the energy efficiency of their buildings, tax incentives work well.

Therefore, tax credits granted, which only represented €350 million in 2003, will exceed €900 million this year. In total, the financing of renewable energy has increased by 10 since 2002.

This has been established to support households in favouring energy efficiency when performing work to their homes.

The positive impact of these measures: the related industry sectors have significantly increased their business. This has been the case, for example, with renewable energy, showing a very clear increase in buildings equipped with solar energy heating systems.

Proof that we are in a "virtuous" cycle, which I intend to continue encouraging and supporting.

I will not stop here. There is still much to do and the importance of the measures that I have included in the upgrade of the Climate Plan in this regard will help us progress even further. Let me list a few.

First, as an elected official of Garges-lès-Gonesse, I noted first-hand the sad insufficiency in building quality within my city.

Less privileged households are often those who pay the highest energy bills and live in the greatest discomfort.

I therefore wished, as you know, to have new housing, in particular subsidized housing, built from a high environmental quality perspective, particularly in terms of energy efficiency.

Very early on, I wrote to my colleague, the Minister of Housing, and to the President of the National Agency for Urban Renovations, and asked them to systematically include this approach in the construction projects planned under the Social Cohesion measures.

I am proud to say that concrete measures have been included in the upgrade of the Climate Plan in the context of a chapter specifically focusing on public subsidies to social housing.

More generally, I endeavoured to develop new tax measures, which, as I mentioned earlier, are effective tools.

The Climate Plan therefore provides municipalities with the opportunity to temporarily exempt from property taxes, if they so choose, tax payers having effected energy saving works to their homes. This measure applies to new housing, as well as existing housing.

Another innovative measure is the “sustainable development” booklet. This booklet will allow individuals to access loans at lower rates to conduct energy saving changes.

I am also working on the recognition and use of private initiatives and have created a “very low consumption” certification with the EFFINERGIE association.

Finally, coming full circle back to the importance of your activities, the upgraded Climate Plan includes measures related to research in the construction industry.

What would the measures I described earlier amount to without energy-efficient equipment?

Without new construction technologies?

Without the professionalism of major groups and also smaller craftsmen?

Without those who develop all these technologies?

The actions conducted by the energy-building foundation will continue.

And the Government will continue to provide its full support to the research programs set in place by the PREBAT Programme for research on energy in buildings.

A few months ago, I had the honour of signing the collaboration protocol that created PREBAT.

I am convinced that this research and support strategy will lead to a rapid and concrete application of its results.

Therefore, yes, research in the field of energy-efficient buildings is essential.

You need the support of Governments through various measures to develop energy-efficient innovations. I need you to develop these innovations, so important to our sustainable development.

As long as your objective is the protection of our environment and, in our present case, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, you can count on my support.

Once again, thank you for your invitation. And my full support in your activities!