

Innovating for economic growth: Jerzy Buzek MEP

By Jerzy Buzek
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Innovation is crucial for the EU if it is to enjoy economic success, but growth has to be balanced with social security and protection of the environment.

A fundamental aim of economic development in the free market economy is to achieve competitiveness. But economic growth has to be balanced with social security and protection of the environment. Therefore, the most important challenge is how to achieve competitiveness within this context. And finding the right response to this is vital if the EU is to enjoy economic success in the 21 century.

Achieving competitiveness is possible only with a focus on innovation. As environmental protection is to some extent putting restrictions on business activity, innovation in the ecological sector has now a double importance.

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The fight against climate change is the most serious challenge that the world is currently facing and both industry and producers of energy have responsibilities to combat global warming. A significant threat to the climate comes from the process of producing energy and it is therefore urgent to promote innovation in this area.

Innovation in the energy sector, which could help protect the climate and would help reduce carbon dioxide emissions, are crucial to achieving competitiveness in other areas, too – from information and communication technology to space, nanotechnology and healthcare.

The EU has for several years paid special attention to innovation in the production of energy. For the first time since the framework research programmes for research were established, the seventh round of funding gives special priority to energy. And about one-third of the framework programme for competitiveness and innovation, which focuses on small and medium-sized enterprises, is dedicated to innovation in the energy sector. The European Institute of Innovation and Technology, too, seeks to integrate the three sides of the so-called knowledge triangle – higher education, research, and business-innovation – in the area of energy technology.

But the most important part of the EU's policy on competitiveness, along with the restructuring of the energy sector, is the European strategic energy technology (SET) plan. Its main aim is to accelerate the development and implementation of low-carbon technologies, but the SET plan also focuses on wind power, solar power and bio-energy. Equally important is the European industrial initiative on energy efficiency. We cannot achieve ambitious environmental goals without smart grids and cross-border grids. But the initiatives mentioned above are not enough to solve the EU's energy problems. We have to continue using clean coal and nuclear energy, and the EU needs to keep its focus on these energy sources.

Scientific and technical developments will play a key role in curbing the rising demand for energy and in managing carbon emissions. The link between the industry and climate changes is evident, but innovation could do more than help curb emissions. Innovation could also help bring down energy costs and increase the security of energy supply. This is crucial for the EU's economic growth and competitiveness, and for the well-being of its citizens in the 21st century.

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