

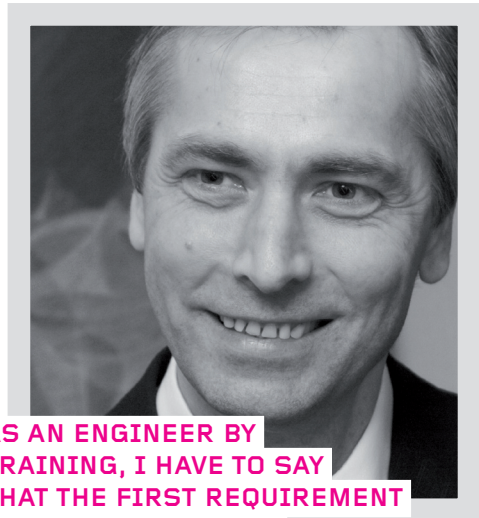
**MESSAGE FROM MR JÁN FIGEL'
MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
RESPONSIBLE FOR EDUCATION AND
TRAINING, CULTURE AND YOUTH**

**EUROPEAN YEAR OF CREATIVITY AND
INNOVATION 2009**

The year 2009 will be an important one for design in Europe. In response to suggestions from several Ministers and Members of the European Parliament about possible themes for the year, the Commission has proposed that 2009 should be the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. Already this proposal has met with widespread support. We can look forward to a very successful year of awareness-raising, sharing of good practice and policy reflection on how education and vocational training, both formal and informal, can stimulate people's creativity and give them the necessary self-belief as well as the skills to be true innovators.

From the earliest stages of our reflection on how to shape the forthcoming Year, I insisted that design should have a prominent place: at the interface between the aesthetic and the utilitarian, design reflects the compatibility of artistic and economic concerns, and this compatibility shapes our whole approach to both education and culture. I know, too, that my colleague Günter Verheugen, responsible for enterprise policy, has a keen interest in design and wants it to have a high profile in 2009.

Design practitioners can contribute to the process: the Year gives them an opportunity to demonstrate how, particularly in the modern global economy, design can be a decisive factor in the success of products. Moreover, through networking effects and the way it shapes self-perception and perception by others, design can drive the growth of entire cities and regions.



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As an engineer by training, I have to say that the first requirement of design is that it should be functional, and the specific theme of "Design at Work" underlines this. But, as the European Commissioner whose responsibilities include education, culture, and youth, I am also sensitive to the value of imagination and indeed playfulness in opening up new avenues of exploration for the mind and the spirit.

Innovation and creativity are above all a matter of attitude, even if successful innovation has to be underpinned by knowledge and skills. Perhaps one of the things that we Europeans need to do is to rediscover a light-hearted approach to the things that we make and do: how many successful products and services emanating from the United States or Japan sprang in the first instance from the mind of *homo ludens* rather than *homo faber*?

So I hope that those who attend Design at Work 09 in Kortrijk will find it above all an enjoyable as well as a profitable experience.