

SwissCore Synopsis Research

March-May 2003

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SwissCore - Swiss Contact Office for Research and Higher Education, Rue du Trône 98, B-1050 Bruxelles
 Tel +32-2-549 09 80, Fax +32-2-549 09 89, infodesk@swisscore.be, <http://www.iglortd.org/swisscore.htm>

Stem cell debate in Brussels: report and inter-institutional conference

In summer 2002, there had been a heated debate about the question of whether research with human embryos and human embryonic stem cells should be supported under FP6. At that point, it was decided that the Commission would currently not fund stem cell research (with the exception of the study of banked or isolated human embryonic stem cells in culture) and that it would establish detailed implementing provisions concerning this type of research by 31 December 2003. Input would come from an inter-institutional discussion between Commission, Council and Parliament (see Synopsis August-October 2002).

In early April, the Commission presented a report on human embryonic stem cells to the Council and the European Parliament. The report is very comprehensive and provides a description of the state of play of the scientific, ethical, legal, social, and economic topics relating to this issue. In that sense, it served as a basis for the promised inter-institutional seminar which took place in Brussels on 24 April 2003.

In the opening statements, it was mentioned repeatedly that the seminar did not have to resolve the more fundamental problem of whether stem cell research was ethically acceptable. Rather, it was to concentrate and give input on the question if this type of research should be funded under FP6.

Three areas were summarised in which, on the one hand, a European consensus could be seen and in which, on the other hand, more detailed rules are required. According to this consensus, research with embryonic stem cells should, therefore,

- basically be allowed but only with supernumerary embryos, *i.e.* the generation of embryos for research purposes should be forbidden.
- in one way or another undergo a process of (ethical and scientific) application, examination and acceptance.
- be allowed only for specified reasons and aims.

In the subsequent presentations, the biological properties and possibilities of embryonic vs. adult stem cells as well as the resulting ethical problems and questions were highlighted. They can be found in the report published by the Commission.

In the broad discussion the following points were made and questions were addressed. These were on two different levels.

On a scientific and ethical level:

- Research with stem cells opens many clinical possibilities.
- It is not yet clear in which cases adult vs. embryonic stem cells were more appropriate. It was therefore suggested to support these two types of research in parallel.
- It is not yet clear how many stem cell lines would be used in the future.
- It is difficult to define when "life" really starts in a scientific as well as ethical sense.
- The rights and dignity of the embryo will have to be weighted against the rights and dignity of the patient whom could be helped with the results of the corresponding research.

On a political level:

- It was highlighted repeatedly that research with human stem cells would give the EU the opportunity to take the lead in a very promising area. However, this point was neither defined as common goal nor was it discussed what kind of framework conditions were necessary to reach it (e.g. cell banks, etc.).
- Especially in areas like stem cell research, *i.e.* where Member States disagree, mutual tolerance and pluralism are important.
- Stem cell research is an ethically sensitive area and, as such, falls into the national legislation power. However, since FP6 is not a *law*, the subsidiarity principle is not relevant in this context. In other words: even if the Member States have the power to

legislate on stem cell research, the Commission is formally still free to decide if it wants (or not) to support it under FP6.

- This year, the German “Bundestag” rejected the generation of embryonic stem cells from supernumerary embryos, allowing only research with imported cell lines. At the seminar, German representatives mentioned that (1) the support of research requiring the generation of new stem cell lines would be the first case in which a framework programme would fund activities which in at least some Member States were considered a crime, (2) such support would distort European competition since German scientists would not have the same starting positions and possibilities, and (3) Germany, in such a case, would have to rethink their policy regarding their financial contribution to FP6.

Surprisingly, the issue of patenting / patentability of stem cell lines was hardly touched upon at all.

The Commission will now publish draft guidelines for further consultation by end of May / beginning of June.

The report on research with human embryos and embryonic stem cells can be found under <ftp://ftp.cordis.lu/pub/rtd2002/docs/sec441final.pdf>.

◆ **EU-Research Policy:**

Action Plan published in order to reach the “3% target”

On 30 April, the European Commission published a Communication on “Investing in research: an action plan for research”. This important communication contains a roadmap with detailed measures aimed at increasing the levels of investment in Europe both by public and private players. These initiatives should allow the EU countries to reach the target of increasing, by 2010, their spending on research from on average 1.9% of GDP to 3% of GDP, two-thirds of this amount being financed by the private sector.

The Action Plan outlines around 45 new actions which will contribute in a mutually reinforcing way to reaching the overall targets. These actions are targeted at four main groups of issues:

- 1) Foster more support for the coherent development of national and European research policies, where actions aim at:
 - shaping a common vision for the development and deployment of key technologies;
 - enabling all regions to benefit from increased investment in research;
 - designing a coherent mix of policy instruments to increase the effectiveness of actions in this field.
- 2) Improve public support to research and innovation. These actions concentrate on:
 - human resources in the field of research;
 - links between the public research base and industry;
 - public instruments for the financing research and their effectiveness (support measures for research and innovation, fiscal measures, guarantee mechanisms and support to risk capital for SMEs).
- 3) Redirect public spending towards research and innovation, where actions will support:
 - investment within the limits of the stability and growth pact and other policy guidelines;
 - a balance between national and EU public funding for research until 2010
 - the clarification of the Community state aid rules;
 - better information on public procurement rules in the EU.
- 4) Improve the framework conditions for private investment in research. These actions will look at:
 - intellectual property rights;
 - legislation in the field of the regulation of products and standardisation;
 - competition rules;

- financial markets;
- fiscal measures;
- corporate research strategy, management and financial reporting in companies.

For each action, the Commission details which actors (Member States, industry, research institutions,...) as well as which timeframe are targeted.

Together with the Action Plan the Commission has issued two sets of documents:

- 1) a Commission staff Working Paper, which provides supporting data and information and
- 2) a set of five reports by expert groups, which were charged by the Commission to review the effectiveness of public support mechanisms for private sector R&D.

The Action Plan as well as all related documents are available under:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/era/3pct/index_en.html

Creation of a European Research Council: ESF position paper published

In April 2003, the European Science Foundation published a position paper about the creation of a European Research Council (ERC). Based on the findings of a High Level Group set up for this specific purpose in 2002, the paper concludes that the creation of an ERC is an imperative for the development of a robust pan-European research base.

According to this paper, the mission of an ERC would be to bring a European dimension to the support of long-term fundamental research. It should therefore especially address the areas of fundamental research which are not adequately covered by existing national or European funding structures. Funding for its activities should come from public and possibly private sources. It is also expected that the EU should be the biggest contributor, maybe by shifting certain research components and financial resources from the framework programme to the ERC.

Concerning the organisational structure, the paper recommends making use of an already legally constituted body, such as ESF. This would however mean a complete redefinition of the role and mode of operation of the ESF as it currently stands.

The full version of this position paper "New structures for the support of high-quality research in Europe" can be found at the following address:

<http://www.esf.org/newsrelease/63/ERC.pdf>

Research issues discussed at Competitiveness Council (ITER, Defense Research, Space policy, Art. 169, Association of Israel)

On 13 May, Competitiveness Ministers met in Brussels with a number of issues on their agenda. This session was a historic one, as it was the first time that Ministers from the candidate countries were present -as observers- at a Council meeting. In the field of research, the main issues were the following:

- ITER project: Ministers discussed the current state of negotiations with the United States and China as well as the EU strategy with a view to obtaining the site for the future reactor. The Commission believes the EU has most chances to be selected, if it puts forward a single candidate. For the moment, two sites, one in Spain and one in France, are in the run and the EU candidate is to be put forward in September 2003. However, Spain has already announced its intention to go forward with its candidacy, whatever the decision that is taken in September. No agreement could therefore be found. Currently, the other candidates are Canada and Japan.
For more information on ITER see the last edition of the Synopsis or go to www.iter.org.
- Research on defense equipment: Following a Commission Communication from 11 March 2003 on "European Defence - Industrial And Market Issues", Ministers discussed and adopted conclusions laying down the fundamentals for an EU policy on defense

equipment. In the field of research, the idea is to better coordinate research activities at the edge of military and civilian applications. "Research for security" as Commissioner Busquin called it will be allocated 25 million Euros for 2004 (not from the Framework Programme), and probably more in the future. A field which the Commission has particularly in mind is that of space research (*i.e.* Galileo and GMES). Later this year, the Commission intends to set up a High Level Group which will set up a research agenda focussing on global security and the ways to address it.

The Communication can be found under:

http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2003/com2003_0113en01.pdf

- Space policy: After the Commission's publication of the Green paper on Space policy in January 2003 (see last edition of the Synopsis), Ministers discussed and adopted a resolution which should be fed into the White Paper on Space Policy which will be published by the end of the year. Although the scope of the resolution remained fairly limited, Ministers especially stressed the need to find a compromise with ESA on a future European space policy.
- EDCDTP (Article 169): Ministers adopted the Decision on Community participation in the research programme aimed at developing new clinical interventions to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis ("Article 169"). The programme will be financed by the EU to a maximum of 200 million Euro, which will be added to the approx. 200 million Euro from the participation of Member States. It is envisaged that funds from other private and public sources should add another 200 million to the programme. 15 countries will participate fully in this initiative: all Member States, without Finland, but with Norway. It is planned that States associated to FP6 should be able to be associated to the EDCDTP initiative as well.
- Association of Israel to FP6: Ministers adopted the Decision approving the signing of the Agreement on the Scientific and Technical Cooperation between the European Community and the State of Israel. Under the terms of the agreement, Israel will be associated to the 6th Framework Programme (from 01.01.2003) as soon as the agreement has been signed. This should happen in the next few weeks.

The minutes of the meeting can be found under: <http://www.consilium.eu.int/en/summ.htm>

◆ 6th Framework Programme (FP6)

New call table (in annex to this Synopsis) to keep track of FP6 calls

In the last weeks, different new calls for proposals have been published by the European Commission in the following fields:

- Science and Society (Expression of Interest),
- Research and Innovation and
- a specific call for Associated Candidate Countries.

For other calls, the Commission has also just published corrigenda:

- change in the deadline from the 19.09.2003 to the 23.09.2003 in the areas of Aeronautics (call identifier: FP6-2002-Aero-2) and Sustainable Surface Transport (FP6-2002-Transport-2)
- changes for two Science and Society calls:
 1. in call FP6-2002-science and society-1 (programme support and networking): this is an open call for which the Commission has added 3 closure dates: 27.05.2003, 28.08.2003 and 09.12.2003.
 2. in call FP6-2002-science and society-3 (Descartes Prize), evaluation criteria have been modified.

Furthermore, Programme Committees have been meeting recently, and will continue to do so, in order to prepare the work programmes for 2004, which will contain the calls to be published in that year.

In order to keep track of all these new calls, we have included in this issue a revised version of a call table where all calls known at the moment are included. In an effort to give early information, we have also tried to include information about calls which will be included in work programmes which are still under discussion. For these, some details, such as the exact dates, could still be missing.

Call for Specific Support Actions (SSA) to boost Candidate Countries' participation

On 4 April, the Commission launched a call for proposals for Specific Support Actions to help support the participation of partners from candidate countries in FP6.

Of the total 13 million Euro, 9 will be devoted to "specific support measures", whereby organisations in the candidate countries will be selected a) to establish networks to exchange best practice and train project proposers and b) to assist SMEs in partner search, consortium agreements and project development.

Another 4 millions will be directed at financing actions for the different thematic priorities. In the priorities 3 (NanoMatPro), 4 (Aeronautics and Space), 5 (Food Quality and Safety) and 6 a) and b) (Sustainable Energy and Transport), specific actions in order to support participants from Candidate Countries will be financed. These projects could take the form of conferences and brokerage events between researchers from EU and Candidate Countries, partner search databases or studies.

Similar specific actions have already been launched in the priorities 2 (IST) and 7 (Governance and Citizenship). Other will follow in July 2003 in the priorities 1 (Life Sciences) and 6 c) (Global Change).

This call for proposals will be open until 26 June 2003.

More information can be found under:

http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/calls_accssa.cfm

Consultation on a new regulation on R&D aid for SMEs

In line with the goals set in the recent Communication on "Investing in research: an action plan for research" (see article above), the Commission has proposed a new regulation which would allow Member States to grant aid for Research and Development (R&D) to SMEs without having to first apply for clearance from the European Commission.

According to the terms of the new regulation, Member States would be allowed to cover up to 100 per cent of expenses for basic or market orientated research, 60 per cent for industrial and 35 per cent for research that focuses on a pre-market stage. For research that does not fit into these categories, projects would be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Other areas for which exemptions are foreseen are technical feasibility studies, patenting costs and aid schemes.

Lifting the obligation for SMEs to apply for clearance by the European Commission for such aid schemes should "eliminated needless administrative burdens and boost the use of research funds by enterprises" according to Commissioner Busquin.

A consultation of Member States by the Commission will take place in the next months so that a new regulation proposal can be adopted by the Commission by the end of 2003.

For more details on the planned initiatives in this field as well as useful links to the current framework for State Aid in the field of R&D:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/era/3pct/3pct-stateaidrules.html>

A new definition of SMEs at EU level

On 8 May, the European Commission adopted a new definition for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. These new definitions maintain the same levels of staff thresholds as the previous regulation (96/280/EC) but provides for a substantial increase of the financial ceilings, as a result of inflation and productivity increases. The aim of such an increase is to stop penalising those SMEs who are investing more.

SME thresholds

Enterprise category	Headcount (unchanged)	Turnover	or	Balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	• €50 million (in 1996: 40 million)		• €43 million (in 1996: 27 million)
Small	< 50	• €10 million (in 1996: 7 million)		• €10 million (in 1996: 5 million)
Micro	< 10	• €2 million (previously not defined)		• €2 million (previously not defined)

Being a Recommendation of the European Commission, this definition will be applied in all legal acts of the European Economic Area regulating access of SMEs to different benefits (e.g.: exemptions from State aid rules) and programmes such as FP6. It addresses Member States, the European Investment Bank and the European Investment Fund and will be effective as of 1 January 2005.

All details about this new definition -and the old one- can be found under:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/sme_definition/index_en.htm

Scientific co-operation with Ukraine to be continued in FP6

The European Commission is planning to prolong its scientific co-operation agreement with Ukraine. The current agreement was concluded last summer for an initial period concluding in December 2002. It is renewable, by common consent, for further periods of five-years.

As both Ukraine and the European Commission would like the prolongation to be done soon and without change to the current text, the Commission has presented the Council with a draft in early May.

◆ **Aeronautics and space**

Galileo still not off the ground

The disagreement between Italy and Germany having been overcome (see last edition of the Synopsis), it is now Spain who is blocking a decision in ESA on the launch of the Galileo project.

For this reason, the European Parliament has now asked the Member States to overcome their differences of opinion so that the funding and management of the Galileo programme can be agreed on definitely. If need be, the Parliament has also asked the Commission to “take the initiative and unilaterally propose the creation of the Joint Undertaking in order to get the Galileo programme off the ground”.

The resolution of the European Parliament can be found under (on page 34):

<http://www3.europarl.eu.int/omk/omnsapir.so/calendar?APP=PDF&TYPE=PV2&FILE=p0030515EN.pdf&LANGUE=EN>

◆ Citizens and Governance

Can ERA be implemented in the social and human sciences?

In a discussion paper just published by the Commission, the author, Dr. John Smith, maps out national research programmes in the human and social sciences throughout Europe (Switzerland is included in the study) as well as analyses how human and social sciences can best be encouraged for effective participation in ERA to participate effectively.

Mapping out national funding arrangements in the human and social sciences allows the author to distinguish between different models of funding, which he analyses in detail:

1. Strong research council systems with both initiative (targeted research) and responsive mode (“curiosity-driven”) funding systems;
2. Strong research institution funding from several national sources;
3. Strong research council and institution funding with a dominant responsive mode;
4. Mixed (but more limited) research council and institution funding with both initiative and responsive mode funding;
5. EU Framework Programmes playing a major role in funding of research community activities and projects.

The author also identifies clusters of national thematic priority programmes in human and social science research across Europe:

1. **Democracy** Governance, Institutions, Citizenship, Electoral Behaviour, Political Parties, Values, Role of State/Regional, National and European Level.
2. **Economic Performance** Employment, Labour Markets Financial Markets, Fiscal Policy, New Economic and Work Models, Firms' Behaviour Globalisation economic consequences.
3. **European Development** European Union, Enlargement, European Culture, European History, Europe and Rest of the World.
4. **Environment** Sustainable Development & Human Behaviour, Economic Mechanisms/Incentives, International Agreements/ Regulations, Nature and Society.
5. **Health** Demographic and Household Change, Ageing, Youth, Lifestyle (Work and Leisure), Individual Life-Course Analysis, Living Conditions. Health Care Delivery.
6. **Knowledge & Learning** Knowledge Society, Education & Training, Life- long Learning, ICT development & impacts, Media, Languages.
7. **Multi-Ethnic Societies** Identity, Migration, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia Globalisation- social and cultural consequences.
8. **Quality of Life** Urban/Rural Sustainable Communities, Cultural Heritage, Transport & Mobility, Crime, Public Safety & Security.
9. **Science, Technology & Innovation** Science and Society, Ethics, Public Understanding of Science, Science Policy, History of Science.
10. **Welfare State** Social Welfare and Social Security Pensions, Social Capital, Social Cohesion, Poverty & Exclusion.

For all these clusters of issues, the author especially highlights the links with FP6 “connecting themes” and maps out the countries involved in each cluster.

Concentrating then on the possible co-ordination and opening of programmes he pleads for a more structured approach towards the funding for human and social sciences at EU level. One important issue in this context is the enhancement of the participation of researchers from this field in FP6. The author insists primarily on the necessity of the dialogue between the European Commission and national funding agencies. But the author doesn't make very concrete

proposals with regard to this question, as the report was completed before the implementation details of FP6 were known (June 2002).

The report can be found under: <http://www.cordis.lu/citizens/publications.htm>

◆ **Science and society**

Call for Expression of Interest for future Science and Society calls

As was done for the whole of FP6 in 2002, the Directorate for Science and Society has launched on 23 April a call for Expression of Interest in order to better identify activities that correspond to the concerns of interested bodies across Europe. The idea is to better take into account in future calls the interests of the research Community in the Science and Society field. According to the European Commission, the Expressions of Interests (Eoi) received will be considered when revising the 'Science & Society' work programme.

The Commission insists on the fact that it cannot commit to taking all Eois into account when revising the workprogrammes. At the same time, it stresses that the submission of an Eoi gives no preference to any proposal in subsequent calls for proposals. All proposals in response to future calls will be evaluated against published criteria that will take no account of whether or not they had been the subject of an Eoi.

Furthermore, still along the lines of the 2002 Eoi exercise, the Commission may publish non-confidential submissions to help interested parties exchange ideas and establish collaborations. Submitters have the possibility to send the Commission an abstract for an intended activity of maximum 1000 characters. As with EPSS, in order to encourage people to submit their proposals early, submitters have the possibility to retrieve and modify their abstract until the deadline –even after a first submission.

The deadline for Expression of Interests is on 2 June 2003.

The form to reply to this consultation as well as the guide for participants can be found under: http://fp6.cordis.lu/eoi/ss/eoi_form.cfm

More information on the current actions in the field of Science and Society can be found under: <http://www.cordis.lu/science-society/>

◆ **SwissCore Küche**

Swiss Science Briefing on Monitoring Innovation in Regions

The Swiss Science Briefings organised jointly by SwissCore and the Swiss Mission to the EU in order to better profile Swiss R&D and innovation in Brussels are now a well established event on the Brussels agenda. The third Swiss Science Briefing took place on 20 March with the title: “*Silicon Mountains* Monitoring science, technology and education as motors for innovation in Europe's alpine regions” and attracted once more over 60 participants.



Christoph Koellreuter

Christoph Koellreuter, managing Director of BAK Basel Economics, together with his deputy director Thomas Kübler outlined the aims and results of the “monitoring innovation in regions” (MIR) initiative, a novel benchmarking technology which monitors the quality and quantity of the application of knowledge (for example, the number of university spin-offs) as well as of knowledge-production (for example, the number of university graduates) in regions. Given the diversity of regions in terms of size, specification, geography and population, regions monitored in MIR have been divided into four categories: metropolitan, technology, conversion or tourism regions. Each category is then divided between “above average”, “average” and “below average” rankings. Although data indicates that metropolitan and technology regions perform best with respect to overall innovation results, good innovation also requires other framework conditions such as an innovation and diffusion-friendly regulatory framework for the economy at large.

Richard Escritt, Director for the co-ordination of Community activities in the DG Research, responded to the presentation and underlined the importance of regions in the European Research Area. He also emphasised the key role played by universities as regional innovation actors.

The timing of this event was perfect, as the Commission had just published papers of the role of universities in ERA as well as many important innovation policy documents. More details on the Communication on a new approach to innovation policy and on the Innobarometer 2002 can be found in the previous edition of the Synopsis.

8 April 2003: Spring Stagiaire Apéro

On 8 April, SwissCore organised its traditional Stagiaire Apéro in order to get together the Swiss newcomers in Brussels. We are especially happy with this spring's edition both in terms of the number of persons present, around 20- and because of the fact that all of our partners in Switzerland –SNF, OFES and Euresearch- were represented.

It was therefore an excellent opportunity for SwissCore to act as an exchange platform, not only between Brussels and Bern, but also between “Bernese” –most stagiaires are in Brussels only for 3 months- who deal with and are interested in EU matters, not only in the field of research. The Swiss Mission to the EU was also well represented and Jürg Burri, Science and Technology Counsellor, gave the participants an update on the bilateral negotiations in the field of Research and Education.

SwissCore Annual Event: le Paul Scherrer Institut (PSI) à l'honneur

Le 29 avril 2003 a eu lieu l'Annual Event de SwissCore. Cette réception dont le but est de remercier les partenaires de SwissCore pour leur collaboration lors de l'année écoulée a à nouveau été bien fréquentée, un peu plus d'une septantaine de personnes étaient présentes.

Cette année l'hôte d'honneur était Ralph Eichler, Directeur du Paul Scherrer Institut, Villingen. Annalise Eggimann, Directrice adjointe du Fonds national suisse, introduisit la partie officielle de la soirée en souhaitant la bienvenue à tous de la part du FNS. Dans son discours, le prof. Eichler mit ensuite particulièrement mis l'accent sur la dimension internationale de son institution

et de la recherche suisse en général ainsi que sur l'importance de garder la qualité de la recherche comme but premier.

Comme toujours, l'ambiance fut cordiale et les conversations se prolongèrent plus longtemps que prévu. Un bon signe pour la présence de la recherche suisse à Bruxelles...



Prof. Ralf Eichler



Guy Martens (Belgium), Peter Kind (European Commission), Gianpietro van de Goor (European Commission)