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DG Research reorganises its services in view of FP7

On 1 October, a fully revised organisational structure entered into force at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research (DG RTD). The goal was to adapt the structure of the DG to the upcoming 7th Framework Programme (FP7).

According to the new organigramme, DG RTD will be divided into two major parts, each under the supervision of a Deputy Director-General:

- The first part, "Political framework and simplification", led by the former Head of cabinet of Philippe Busquin, Daniel Jacob, includes six Directorates dealing mainly with the conceptual and strategic aspects of the Framework Programme, as well as the Directorate-general's internal administrative unit ("Resources"). It also includes the two Directorates that will become Executive Agencies after the start of FP7. These are the new Directorate S, which will become the Dedicated Implementation Agency of the European Research Council, and the new Directorate T, which will become the Executive Agency in charge of the implementation of the Marie Curie and the SME-specific measures. The remaining four Directorates will deal with "Interinstitutional and legal matters" (Directorate A), "Research programme and capacity" (Directorate B; e.g. coordination of national programmes, infrastructures), "Knowledge-based economy" (Directorate C; strategy and policy aspects of research) and "International cooperation" (Directorate D).
- The second part, "Scientific advances", under the leadership of Zoran Stancic, will contain all the thematic Directorates. Their number has been increased from 7 to 8, as the Energy Theme was split between its nuclear and non-nuclear part. On the other hand, the Directorate for the Social Science and Humanities has been merged with that on "Science and Society" and moved into the new Directorate "Science, economy and society", which was transferred to the thematic group.

This new structure divided in two parts clearly increases the role of the two Deputy Director-Generals from substitutes to managers with more operational responsibilities. By adding one more layer of management between the Directors and the Director-General, the new organigramme hints at the fact that the Director-General, Jose Maria Silva Rodriguez, sees his role as being more strategic than operational and therefore wants to move himself further away from the daily business.

At the level of the Units, a noticeable novelty is the disappearance of the "sectors", which were subunits within the different Units of a Directorate. Moreover, several Units have been renamed. For example, the former "Strategy and policy" Units in all the thematic Directorates have become "Horizontal aspects and coordination" Units. All the strategic aspects have been grouped in Directorate C "European Research Area: Knowledge-based economy". Other distinct changes with the previous organigramme can also be seen in some, but not all of the themes, mostly in Directorates E "Biotechnology - Food processing industry", and F "Health". It remains to be seen if renaming thematic Units will also lead to a change in the way of working of the people composing these Units.

It can also be noted that the "Communication" Unit moved up from within the former "Science and society" Directorate to a position directly under the Director-General. This could be seen as a sign of the importance the new Director-General wants to give to the communication with researchers and the general public.

The change in structure has been accompanied by major reshuffling of personnel and the arrival of a new Vice Director-General, as well as many new Directors and Heads of Unit. Such an important change at the time where most FP6 projects are running, the last FP6 contracts are being finalised and FP7 preparations are in full speed will certainly be the cause of some confusion.

The new organigram of the DG Research can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/research/pdf/organisation_en.pdf#pagemode=none

Foreseen controversy on the proposal for a European Institute of Technology

After two Communications to the European Council (Heads of State and Government), intense discussions throughout the year and numerous formal and informal meetings with stakeholders, the European Commission will finally be tabling its legislative proposal for the creation of a European Institute of Technology (EIT) on 18 October. Although this paper is not yet published, the report below is based on a recent draft SwissCore gained access to.

The EIT, a brainchild of Commission President Manuel Barroso, is thought to serve as a link between the three corners of the knowledge triangle: education, research and innovation. It is foreseen that the EIT would be a “science operator” set up as a virtual institution, gathering several Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KIC) in fields where strategic scientific and technological challenges have to be met. These Communities, composed of networks of researchers working at existing top European institutions, would be selected by a Governing Board, which would also identify the relevant strategic topics. After selection, each Community would then set up its own operational structure, and would be able to choose between different options concerning the status of their human resources (including secondment, dual affiliation and temporary attachments like sabbaticals).

Besides these elements, which had already been laid out in the Commission’s Communication of 8 June (see Synopsis Research 2006/3), the current legislative proposal gives an answer to a number of points which had so far been left open:

- Budget: A clear message from the stakeholders was that the EIT should not draw away money from the science and innovation budgets. In view of this, the Commission’s current proposal will certainly raise some opposition. Indeed, the Commission estimates the actual costs of the EIT in 2007-2013 to amount to approx. €2.37 billion, the major part of it, namely €1.75 billion, coming from the EU budget, from within Headings 1A and 1B. These are the headings under which FP7 and CIP (1A) as well as the cohesion and structural funds (1B) are financed. The remainder of the budget, roughly €620 million, will be covered by other sources of financing (see below), as well as an expected co-financing coming from the Knowledge and Innovation Communities, estimated at 10% for the first two years, 15% in year 3 and 20% thereafter.
- Other sources of financing: In its EIT Communications, the Commission always stressed the fact that additional sources of financing would be tapped to finance the EIT. Despite some efforts in this direction, the major part of the budget is nevertheless planned to be covered by the EU budget. In the proposal, the Commission names the following possible sources:
 - Contributions from Member States or public authorities within them;
 - Contributions from the private sector, e.g. businesses, foundations, etc.;
 - Inheritances, donations from individuals or institutions;
 - Revenue generated by the EIT’s own activities (e.g. IPR);
 - Contributions of third countries and international organisations;
 - Loans (e.g. from the European Investment Bank).
- Legal basis: The Commission bases its proposal on Art. 157 of the treaty, regarding industrial policy. Since the Treaty article determines the budgetary source for Community actions, this allows the Commission to tap into the part of the EU budget planned for “Growth and employment”, where the funds for research and innovation are also located (see above). On the technical side, the EIT should be established by a Regulation adopted by co-decision between the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.
- Legal form: The future seat of the EIT is left open, but it is proposed that the EIT could be established as a foundation. It is foreseen that besides the Governing Board, a Director and an Audit Committee would be part of the governance structure of the EIT.
- Degrees: This was another intensely discussed point during the stakeholder meetings. Indeed, the European universities are not thrilled with this proposal. However, the Commission went ahead and proposes that the EIT would award its own degrees. However, joint degrees with other educational institutions are also foreseen, which might appease this opposition.
- Participation of Switzerland: The participation of Non-Member States is foreseen in the proposal, under the condition of the signing of a bilateral agreement. It is however still too early to report on the possible details of such an agreement and the costs of participating to the EIT.

One of the main points that the research community will look at is the issue of the budget and its possible links with FP7. The source of the financing within the EU budget planned for the EIT will likely worry many research institutes, which warned from the first EIT Communication onwards that the EU research budget, especially FP7, should not be touched. Additionally, the question of the degrees awarded by the EIT has been a major point of friction with European universities.

The EIT proposal is planned to be adopted by the Commission on 18 October and to be discussed at the informal meeting of the European Council (Heads of State and Government) in Lathi on 20 October. It remains to be seen what the political institutions of the EU will do with this project, which so far has mainly enjoyed strong support from the European Commission's top hierarchy.

◆ **News in Brief**

7th Framework Programme (FP7)

FP7 proposal: Agreement in sight

On 25 September, the Competitiveness Council (Council of Ministers) adopted its Common Position on FP7. This officially closed the first reading of the co-decision procedure. Indeed, the European Parliament had adopted its report on 15 June and the European Commission had presented a revised proposal on 28 June, which already included most, but not all of the changes proposed by Parliament. This revised proposal had already taken preliminary comments by the Council into account, in order to accelerate the adoption procedure. During the summer, a series of "trialogue" meetings between the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the European Commission have then taken place, in order to iron out the differences between the three institutions and allow a fast second reading.

Based on these trialogues, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers were able to agree on:

- Measures to support increased participation of SMEs in FP7, including:
 - The aim that 15% of the funding available under the Cooperation part should go to SMEs.
 - Support to the "national exploratory awards" for SMEs to help them prepare proposals for actions under the part "Research for the benefit of SMEs" in Capacities.
- Separation of the Space and Security priority into two separate ones.

On ethical issues, the Council went further than the Parliament and agreed at the Competitiveness Council meeting of 24 July that all research requiring the destruction of human embryos to obtain new embryonic stem cell lines will be excluded from FP7. The Parliament wanted merely to forbid the creation of embryos for the sole purpose to gain stem cells. For the use of already existing embryonic stem cells, both institutions kept to the current practice that national laws will apply to project participants (see Synopsis Research 2006/3). However, this compromise on the issue of stem cells remained unsatisfactory for five countries (Austria, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia), which rejected the Common Position. So far, the European Parliament has not opposed to the Council's position on stem cells and it looks as if this issue will not be raised again during the second reading.

Despite the agreement on the points above, some major issues are still being discussed between the two institutions. However, during further triologue meetings in October, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers were able to come closer to an agreement on some of the contentious issues:

- The main issue is the future legal structure of the European Research Council (ERC). The two structures proposed so far, either an Executive Agency or a structure based on Art. 171 of the Treaty will not give the European Parliament the right of co-decision on its establishment. The Parliament therefore wants to find a solution that would allow it to have its say on the future structure of the ERC. As the results of a planned evaluation of the ERC will influence its future legal form, the European Parliament wants the ERC to be evaluated already in 2008, before the European elections in 2009. At the last triologue meeting, it was discussed that the Commission would present in 2008 a Communication on the "methodology and terms of

reference” of the evaluation of the ERC and would make proposals for an adaptation of the FP7 legal document to legally establish the ERC. Such a modification would require co-decision, therefore directly involving the Parliament in the shaping of the ERC.

- The allocation of 2/3 of the budget of the “Energy” theme to renewable energy and energy efficiency, as proposed by Parliament, is opposed by the Commission and has not found much support in Council. The compromise reached at the recent trialogue foresees that a “major part” of the budget will be reserved to these topics, without defining precise amounts as first requested by Parliament.
- The planned Risk-Sharing Finance Facility. It is foreseen that €1 billion from the FP7 budget will go as a “guarantee” to the European Investment Bank, which in return will provide up to €10 billion in loans for research infrastructures and projects. The European Parliament estimates that the budget allocated to this instrument is too high, and the Council of Ministers still wants certain details to be clarified. This item is currently being discussed in further trialogue meetings and a compromise is expected soon.

The FP7 proposal is currently in the hands of the European Parliament for a second reading that everyone expects to be quick. Indeed, it is foreseen that the European Parliament’s Industry, Research and Energy Committee (ITRE) will adopt its report on 13 November, allowing the Parliament in plenary to conclude its second reading of FP7 on 29 November. The Competitiveness Council is then expected to adopt the Framework Programme at its last meeting of the year on 4-5 December, thereby closing the legislative process of adoption and allowing FP7 to start on time on 1 January 2007.

The Council’s Common Position on FP7 can be found under:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/06/st12/st12032-ad01re01.en06.pdf>

FP7 Rules for Participation: Towards an adoption in one reading

As with the FP7 proposal, a series of “trialogue” meetings between the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission have recently taken place in order to reach an agreement on the Rules of Participation to FP7, which also underlies the co-decision procedure, but is planned to be adopted in just one reading. The Committee for Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) of the European Parliament has repeatedly postponed its vote on the most contentious points, in order to solve some of these first in trialogue meetings.

Four main points are currently still being discussed:

- Overhead rate for indirect costs: This is a major point of debate, which will have an important impact on FP7 participants. The Parliament had proposed to have a decreasing flat rate for the indirect costs of 60% in 2007-2009, then 45% in 2010-2012, and finally 30%. According to a recent proposal from the Finnish EU Presidency, the Council is aiming for a flat rate of 60% until 1 January 2010, after which date this could be revised to an overhead rate “not lower than 40%”. Alternatively, an “individual” best approximation of these indirect costs based on their common practice could also be used by non-for-profit participants.
- Role of the coordinator: In the view of the European Parliament, the coordinator should be legally responsible for the consortium. The Council proposes to give the coordinator only the obligation to monitor the participants of the consortium.
- Evaluation criteria: According to the Parliament, the evaluation criteria should be laid out in the Rules for Participation, since it is a legally binding document. The Council seems ready to conciliate on this issue and inserted a – slightly modified – version of the Parliament’s amendment into the compromise proposal.
- Guarantee fund: The Council proposes to clarify certain aspects concerning the planned “guarantee fund”, a retained amount on industry partners’ project share. This fund would be used to cover the risk of defaulting participants.

Once a compromise on these points will have been found between the three institutions, the Parliament will resume its first reading of the Rules for Participation. It is therefore planned that the Rules for Participation will be adopted in a single reading, to prevent delays in the start of FP7.

The Parliament's ITRE Committee had voted on 12 September on all the amendments on the less contentious issues, which makes a swift adoption of the report possible once a compromise is found. It looks like the Parliament will adopt its report on the Rules for Participation in its November plenary session, after which the legal document could be adopted by Council at the Competitiveness Council meeting of 4-5 December, together with the FP7 proposal.

European Research Council (ERC): The organisation and work plan take shape

On 30 August, the Scientific Council of the European Research Council announced the selection of the ERC Secretary General for the first five years of its operation. The Secretary General will play a major role in the relations between the Scientific Council, which defines the ERC's strategy and programme, and the Dedicated Implementing Structure (Executive Agency), which will deal with the implementation of the ERC. To ensure the integrated operation of the ERC, the Secretary General will be a member of the ERC Board, which besides him will be composed of the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Scientific Council as well as the Director of the Dedicated Implementing Structure.

Instead of choosing one person for the whole 5 first years, the Scientific Council has chosen to split the task between two eminent, but quite different personalities and profiles: Prof. Ernst Ludwig Winnacker, current President of the DFG (German Science Foundation), will occupy the position from January 2007 to June 2009, while Andreu Mas-Colell, Professor of Economy at the University Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, will take over from July 2009 to December 2011.

In parallel to this recruitment process, the Scientific Council, together with the Dedicated Implementing Structure, has been preparing the 2007 Work Programme for the ERC. Besides summarising the two main instruments (Starting Grants and Advanced Grants) and the proposal evaluation procedure (review panels; see Synopsis Research 2006/3), the work programme also sheds light on some interesting new points:

- To limit the number of submissions, candidates who already have submitted a project during the current or the previous year will not be eligible, unless their proposal was not financed purely for budgetary reasons (i.e. they passed the required threshold but did not get funded). Moreover, a researcher as "principal investigator" will only be allowed a single grant from the ERC at the time.
- The ERC foresees the launch of "support actions", like conferences and studies. This instrument would notably be used to collaborate with national funding agencies.
- The calendar of calls for proposals foresees one call per year, in August for the Starting Grants and in October for the Advanced Grants. For the first year of FP7, however, these calls will be advanced to December 2006 and August 2007, respectively.
- The proposed evaluation criteria and possible questions for evaluators are listed in an annex. According to this list, 3 main criteria will be assessed: 1) the potential of the candidate, 2) the quality of the proposed research, and 3) the organisation, the administration and the resources at the disposal of the researcher.

To implement this Work Programme, the Scientific Council will be helped by the Dedicated Implementing Structure. This Executive Agency would be formed on 1 January by an outsourced part of DG Research and will recruit additional staff during its operation. In the reorganisation of the Directorate-General (see article above), this outsourcing has already been taken into account and a new Directorate has been created, that prefigures the future Agency. The Agency's Director will be Jack Metthey, formerly in charge of Aeronautics and Space, with Rudolf Meijer (formerly in charge of the Marie Curie excellence grants) as an advisor for international matters. The Directorate will at first be divided into four Units, namely:

- Strategic matters and relations with the Scientific Council (Head of Unit: William Cannell)
- Management of the "Ideas" programme (acting Head: Ben Tubbing)
- Logistic support to the ERC (acting Head: Director Jack Metthey)
- Administration and Finance (Head: M. Bohle)

Further developments are also expected after the review of the ERC, which could happen as early as 2008. This review will be the basis for determining the adequate legal structure and organisation of the ERC.

Coordination of national research programmes: EUROSTARS to be the first Art.169 initiative

Under FP7, three types of schemes are foreseen to support the coordination of national research programmes: ERA-Net, ERA-Net+ and Art. 169 initiatives. These three schemes target different stages of integration of the national programmes. Whereas ERA-Nets foresee the networking and coordination of national programmes without the existence of common funding instruments, ERA-Net+ presupposes the establishment of a common funding pot and can receive an additional financial top-up from the Framework Programme. The most advanced stage of integration is realised in the Article 169 initiatives, which allow for the European Community's financial participation in jointly implemented research programmes of several Member States.

The European Commission is currently examining four projects that could be proposed as Art. 169 initiatives:

- Ambient Assisted Living (ICT);
- BONUS (Baltic sea research);
- Metrology (Science of measurement);
- EUROSTARS (for research-performing SMEs).

As it currently looks, the first Art. 169 initiative to be launched might well be EUROSTARS, a project of the inter-governmental organisation EUREKA, which has a track record of helping research-performing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It plans to combine funding from the EUREKA member countries and from the Framework Programme, as well as venture capital, to a total of about €400 million for 7 years. The contribution from the Framework Programme will most likely come from the SME-specific measures in the Capacities part and is expected to amount to €100 million.

EUROSTARS is planned to be specifically targeted at SMEs performing their own research. International collaborations of such research-performing SMEs would be supported by research grants from EUREKA, who will administer this programme. This way, EUROSTARS could nicely complement the SME-specific measures of FP7, which allow SMEs to subcontract the needed research activities to academic partners.

In accordance with Article 169, the European Commission is planning to present a proposal to the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers for the EUROSTARS initiative, most likely already at the beginning of 2007. 21 of the 38 EUREKA member countries, including Switzerland, have already given their official commitment to this project. Depending on the speed of the political adoption process, both on the EU and on the EUREKA side, EUROSTARS could start as of summer 2007 and could therefore be the first Art. 169 initiative to be set up under FP7.

More information on EUREKA can be found under:

<http://www.eureka.be/home.do>

Technology platforms: Plans of the “Innovative Medicines Initiative” for FP7

On 18 September, the “Innovative Medicines Initiative” (IMI) Technology Platform presented its new Strategic Research Agenda, laying out its planned actions for a Joint Technology Initiative under FP7.

The IMI Technology Platform is the forum of the major European pharmaceutical industries, amongst them the Swiss Roche and Novartis, and is coordinated by the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA). As with all other Technology Platforms, the aim of IMI is to identify bottlenecks in research and development processes of the industry and to devise research strategies to overcome these. These strategies are laid out in the Strategic Research Agenda.

The Innovative Medicines Initiative Strategic Research Agenda (SRA) consists of four pillars that address the principal shortcomings in the biomedical research and development process:

- Improving the drug safety testing;
- Improving the efficacy of the drug creation process;
- Knowledge management;

- Education and training.

To implement these measures, the Innovative Medicines Initiative will likely be proposed as a Joint Technology Initiative under FP7, with a total budget of more than €3 billion for 7 years. It is planned that the European Commission (under the “Health” theme) and the biopharmaceutical companies would contribute equally towards this investment.

Such a Joint Technology Initiative would be established as a public-private partnership based on Art. 171 of the Treaty and would run as a separate programme. According to Art. 171, the Commission has to present a proposal to the Council for approval. A new organisation would have the mandate to award research grants to consortia of industry and academia. These consortia would conduct the research outlined in the Strategic Research Agenda of the Innovative Medicines Initiative.

The Commission plans to support this initiative, but its participation in this Joint Technology Initiative would have to be drawn from the “Health” budget which could therefore be reduced it by about one quarter. It remains to be seen if the Council will agree with such an investment concentrating on the drug development process.

The Strategic Research Agenda of the Innovative Medicines Initiative can be found under: http://www.efpia.org/4_pos/SRA.pdf

International cooperation under FP7: Overview of possibilities

Integration of (non-European) Third Countries should be much easier in FP7, but criticism about the lack of visibility of the possibilities for international cooperation has been voiced. The activities of international cooperation in FP7 are numerous and can be summarised as follows:

- In the Cooperation part of FP7, there are several ways for Third Countries to participate:
 - a) As an additional partner in a regular consortium, in addition to the minimum number of participants: Participants coming from a country which is listed on the Third Country cooperation list (“ICPC countries”, i.e. mostly developing or transition countries) will be financed by the Commission. On the other hand, partners from richer industrialised countries will normally have to provide for their own funding (e.g. by applying for it at national level).
 - b) For specific themes of international cooperation. The Commission foresees to find projects on topics of specific interest to certain developing or transition countries. These will be presented and called for in the respective thematic FP7 Work Programmes. There, the rule of 2 Member or Associated States plus 2 international partners as minimum requirement will apply. As these themes will only be laid out in the yearly Work Programmes, it will be difficult to get an overview of these actions.
- In the Ideas part, researchers from Third Countries can be recruited into the team of the applicant.
- In the People part, the participation of Third Country researchers to Training Networks is open up to a certain percentage. Moreover, there are specific fellowships for third country researchers within the international dimension part of the programme.
- In the Capacities part specific for international cooperation, research projects will probably not be funded. This part of the programme is planned to focus on coordination actions (e.g. conferences) and similar initiatives.

Despite this profusion of activities, the seeming current lack of an overall strategy has not helped to give a clear overview of the international cooperation activities within FP7. Problematic is also the absence of clear budget lines for international cooperation activities, as underlined in a rather critical report on the international research cooperation of the EU published by the European Research Advisory Board (EURAB) in June.

With this report, EURAB puts the finger on one of the perceived weaknesses of FP7. This report sets forth the need for a more active, purposeful cooperation in science and technology with other regions of the world. For this purpose, EURAB makes following recommendations:

- Develop a strong, proactive international cooperation policy for science and technology. For this, large “flagship projects” that would be visible both in the EU and in the partner countries are needed.

- This policy should clearly define priorities and determine areas of cooperation. For this, the EU needs to differentiate among partner countries on the basis of their competitive capacities and societal needs. Different groups of partner countries need also different instruments of cooperation.
- International cooperation should become an integral part of the Framework Programme and receive adequate funding, i.e. each theme should have a single horizontal budget line for international cooperation.

It remains to be seen if the Commission will be able to correct the current views and if the international cooperation activities will get the position they deserve within the thematic areas of the Framework Programme.

The report of EURAB on international research cooperation can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/eurab/pdf/eurab_05_032_wg9_finalreport_june06_en.pdf

Finding an FP7 partner in the southern hemisphere

On 5 July, the New Zealand Ministry of Research, Science and Technology, together with the European Commission launched a platform to help researchers from Europe and New Zealand to work more closely together during FP7. This platform, named FRENZ, aims at facilitating collaboration through personal contact (helpdesk for queries, briefing visits to universities and research institutes), information communication (targeted mails, website) as well as information events. The goal of this platform is to increase the participation of researchers from New Zealand in FP7.

Similar initiatives are found in other countries of the southern hemisphere. Australia is running the Forum for European-Australian Science and Technology cooperation (FEAST) and South Africa has set up the European-South African Science and Technology Advancement Programme (ESASTAP). Both these initiatives are funded by FP6, but are expected to remain active under FP7.

All these initiatives will enable researchers in Europe to get facilitated access to information on these countries' science and technology landscape and could be valuable tools to initiate partnerships with these countries in the frame of international cooperation activities (see above).

The website of FRENZ can be found under: <http://www.frenz.org.nz>

The website of FEAST can be found under: <http://www.feast.org>

The website of ESASTAP can be found under: <http://www.esastap.org.za>

New site for FP7 on Cordis

Cordis has recently updated its "Towards FP7" website, to expand the information on FP7. It newly contains information on the timeline of adoption of FP7 and also lists all past milestones. In a flowchart, the co-decision procedure governing the adoption of the FP7 proposal by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers is displayed.

A new section has also been added regarding the participation to FP7. This part outlines some of the proposed requirements and procedures for obtaining funding under FP7. However, this information is only provisional, as it is based on the European Commission's proposals for the Specific Programmes and the Rules for Participation, which still await adoption by the other EU institutions. Cordis will most likely update this information once the legal texts have been adopted.

The FP7 adoption flowchart can be found under: <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/flowchart.htm>

The "Participation" section can be found under: <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/participation.htm#>

EU Research Policy

Transatlantic exchange of expertise on biotechnology

On 8 June, Research Commissioner Potocnik renewed the administrative arrangement for the EC-EU Task Force on Biotechnology Research. This task force, which has been in place since

1990, has the ambitious goal to “anticipate the needs of tomorrow’s science, today”. Through sponsoring workshops and similar activities, this transatlantic biotech task force brings together officials, scientific leaders and early-stage researchers to forecast research challenges and to encourage better links between scientific disciplines. It serves as a platform for discussion, coordination and development of new ideas. The task force is currently addressing topics such as synthetic genomics, environmental biotechnology, plant-based bioproducts, obesity, and emerging infectious diseases, like SARS or avian flu.

The website of the EC-US Task Force on Biotechnology can be found under:
www.ec.europa.eu/research/biotechnology/ec-us

Discussion on the difficulties of public and private R&D cooperation

Following a consultation between 12 May and 31 July 2006 on transnational research cooperation and knowledge transfer between public research organisations (PRO) and industry (see Synopsis Research 2006/2), the Research Directorate-General of the European Commission has published a draft report summarising the results of this survey. The report highlights a number of key issues to be addressed to tighten the links between PRO and industry:

- In the view of many respondents from industry, the exchange of researchers between industry and universities should be improved.
- For many respondents from universities, “innovation-related” activities should be better valued in the appraisal of researcher careers.
- The alignment of interests between a PRO and a private firm is not always straightforward; in the view of industry respondents, universities should have more realistic expectations regarding the transformation of their research results into products.
- PROs find it difficult to balance the researchers’ desire for open access and the need to protect research results.
- Transnational collaboration is hampered by three main factors: cultural differences (including language), legal differences and difficulties in finding partners.
- The differences in the legal framework have a strong disincentive effect. For a large proportion of the respondents, the establishment of a Community Patent is urgently needed.
- Most respondents would like to see more public funding for knowledge transfer activities.
- Technology transfer officers should have some form of accreditation or qualification.

Based on the responses of the consultation, the Commission is going to develop a Communication on knowledge transfer to address some of these issues. Furthermore, in the Commission’s view, the revised industry-academia partnership scheme under the Marie Curie programme of FP7 as well as partner finding through the Innovation Relay Centre under the CIP should both contribute to alleviate some of the shortcomings in the collaboration between PROs and industry.

The draft report can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/consult_report.pdf

Debate on the future of scientific publication

On 6 October, the European Commission published a summary of the collected responses to a public consultation on a study it published earlier this year: “Study on the economic and technological evolution of the scientific publication markets in Europe”. This study was the work of a group of experts led by Prof. Nicolas Dewatripont, who is a member of the Scientific Council of the ERC.

The main findings of the study were the following:

- The current scientific publication system is essential for the certification, dissemination and archiving of scientific data. It plays a major role for the career and the project support of researchers.

- A good publication system is also important for the public sector, given that scientific publishing is publicly supported, and this three times: the author provides the manuscript for free (or even has to pay for the publication), the referees work pro bono and the publicly supported libraries pay for the journals in which the findings are published.
- Due to the internet, conditions have changed for the publication industry, but prices are still constantly increasing. The so-called “library-pay” model dominates the market and leads to financial shortage for a large number of public libraries, whose budgets have not increased accordingly.
- The long-term storage of scientific publications is gradually becoming a main issue. Also for this reason, the Commission launched the “Digital Library” project last year.
- The study recommends making publicly supported research results freely available shortly after publication, to equilibrate the different business models of the publishers and to ensure the continuous access to scientific publications.

The numerous responses to the public consultation on the study showed the importance of the future well-being of research dissemination. Most respondents welcomed the study, its conclusions and recommendations, while publishers were generally critical. There seemed to be significant support for the recommendation that public access to the results of publicly funded research should be guaranteed and that long-term preservation is important. Quality issues were also frequently addressed by respondents, including quality standards used in evaluations and peer reviews.

The responses to the consultation make clear that further investigation of this subject is needed. This study marked the first contribution to this topic; the next step will be a joint Communication from DG Research and DG Information Society on access and dissemination of scientific information, to be released in December 2006. Moreover, a conference on this theme is planned to take place on 15-16 February in Brussels.

The study on the evolution of the scientific publication markets can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/pdf/scientific-publication-study_en.pdf

The results of the consultation can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/synthesis-consultation_en.pdf

EU Innovation Policy

Adoption of the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme finalised

On 12 October, the Council of Ministers adopted the decision establishing the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme 2007-2013 (CIP). Since the European Parliament had adopted its report on 1 June, the Ministers herewith closed the adoption of this new programme in one single reading.

With a total budget of €3.6 billion, the CIP brings together three existing EU programmes and will complement them with new overarching actions to enhance competitiveness and innovation. The three pillars of the CIP and their respective budgets are:

- The Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (MAP) (€2172 million, including €433 million for eco-innovation);
- The ICT Policy Support Programme (€730 million);
- The Intelligent Energy-Europe Programme (€721 million).

With the political adoption process concluded, the Commission is now busy with the preparation of the programme’s implementation. First insights into this process revealed the following:

- Programme administration: The main part of the programme will be administered by DG Enterprise, except for the Intelligent Energy-Europe Programme, which is already run by a dedicated Executive Agency. Some additional parts might be outsourced to this Executive Agency, but the decision still needs to be taken on this issue.
- Participation modalities: The publication of legally binding Rules for Participation as in FP7 are not foreseen. However, following strong request from the European Parliament, the

Commission plans to publish a “participation manual” at the beginning of 2007. The participation modalities will mostly remain the same as in the currently running programmes which will newly be grouped under the CIP.

- Work Programmes: The Commission is currently defining the Work Programmes for 2007; their adoption by the Programme Committees is foreseen in March 2007. Calls for proposals are planned for spring 2007, with a deadline in summer of the same year.

To inform potential participants of the CIP, a series of launch seminars and workshops are planned by the Commission, to be held between February and April 2007. The Commission has promised to make a clear distinction to FP7 activities when communicating on the CIP, in order to give the programme its own profile. However, a first glimpse into the topics of the work programmes hint more towards large overlaps in theme with FP7. Even though the target public and planned activities will differ between both programmes, this might be the cause of some confusion on the side of potential participants.

The Council decision establishing the CIP can be found under:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/06/st03/st03622.en06.pdf>

The Commission’s new comprehensive Communication on Innovation

On 13 September, the European Commission published a new comprehensive strategy paper on innovation. By putting the efforts outlined in previous Communications and Action Plans on this subject into a broader context, the present Communication seeks to stimulate both the supply and the demand side of innovation.

This paper responds to the recommendations of the Aho Report, which was published at the beginning of the year (see Synopsis Research 2006/1). This report had set forth a set of recommendations to improve the innovative capacity of Europe, amongst them to increase the structural mobility of financial and human resources and the funding for research and innovation (supply-side measure) as well as to create a market for innovative goods and services.

The present Communication lays out a roadmap composed of 10 actions that are of particularly high political priority for the European Commission:

1. Invite the Member States to increase the share of public expenditure for education and identify and tackle the obstacles in the Member States’ education systems. Member States should implement the recommendations included in this year’s Communication on universities (see Synopsis Research 2006/2).
2. Establish the European Institute of Technology to help improve Europe’s innovation capacity and performance (see article above).
3. Create an open, single and competitive labour market for researchers with attractive career prospects, including possible incentives for mobility. This was one of the key recommendations of the Aho report.
4. Promote the knowledge transfer between public research organisations (e.g. universities) and industry. The Commission will adopt a Communication on this subject in 2006, based on the findings of a consultation that was performed earlier this year (see article above).
5. Encourage the use by Member States of the EU cohesion funds to support regional innovation.
6. Adopt a new framework for State Aid for research, development and innovation, aiming at “less, but better targeted State Aid”, before the end of 2006 (see article below). Moreover, the Commission will present a Communication on tax incentives for R&D later this year.
7. Table a new patent strategy before the end of the year and prepare a more comprehensive IPR strategy in 2007.
8. Review the legal framework for copyrights in order to promote the development of new digital products, services and business models.
9. Test a strategy to facilitate the emergence of innovation-friendly lead markets and prepare a comprehensive lead markets strategy. Public authorities should create conditions for a successful market uptake of innovative products and services in a focussed way. Primary targets are areas responding to societal needs (e.g. health, transport, security...)

10. Publish and distribute by end of 2006 a handbook on how pre-commercial and commercial procurement can stimulate innovation. This handbook should help Member States to make the best use of the new procurement Directives to stimulate innovation. The use of public procurement in support of innovation was also one of the key points set forth by the Aho report.

This roadmap, as well as the whole Communication, was well received by different stakeholders, which see it as “a step in the right direction”. Especially the measures pertaining to public procurement and intellectual property were welcomed by stakeholders. Industry associations also highlighted the importance of the establishment of a cost-effective Community patent. Significant progress in this matter is expected under the German Presidency in the first half of next year. If this roadmap is realised in a timely manner, it could well boost the innovative capacity of Europe in a major way. However, large efforts remain to be made, especially at the level of the member States.

The European Commission’s Communication can be found under:

<http://www.europe-innova.org/exportedcontent/docs/6/6206/en/EN%20502%20-%20original.doc>

Revision of State Aid Rules: Second Consultation on framework for R&D&I

As reported earlier (see Synopsis Research 2005/4), the European Commission is currently working on the reform of the State Aid Rules, to adapt these to the goals defined in the Lisbon Agenda. As a general rule, State Aid (“any publicly funded support measure for commercial enterprises”) is prohibited, based on the fact that it distorts fair competition. However, there are exceptions and certain types of State Aid can be authorised if they aim at a goal of common interest and do not strongly distort competition. This is for example the case for State Aid measures for research, development and, newly, innovation. The State Aid Framework for Research, Development and Innovation therefore defines the maximal level of state support a commercial enterprise can receive to perform such activities.

A first draft of the new Framework went through a public consultation in spring (see Synopsis Research 2006/2) and, based on its results, the European Commission worked out a second draft, which was open for consultation until 13 October. In the light of the first consultation, a number of improvements have been made on the second draft, particularly with reference to the specific situation of public research entities and innovation intermediaries:

- For “young innovative enterprises” (i.e. businesses established less than 5 years ago), the award of up to €1 million is deemed compatible with State Aid Rules.
- Technology transfer offices can also be granted State Aid, as they represent intermediaries in the innovation chain between public research organisations and industry.
- Aid can be granted for the creation, extension and functioning of “innovation poles”, which are groups of innovative start-ups, SMEs, large businesses and public research bodies active in a specific sector or region and aiming at stimulating innovation activity.

After this second consultation, the Commission is expected to adopt the new State Aid Framework for Research, Development and Innovation before the end of 2006.

The second draft of the State Aid Framework for R&D&I can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/competition/state_aid/others/action_plan/rdi_frame_en.pdf

Publications

Communication on the financing of SME

On 29 June, the European Commission published a Communication: “Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme: Financing SME Growth – Adding European Value”. Therein, it is set forth that better access to debt and equity finance will help all SMEs to achieve their potential. The policy measures undertaken by the Commission to this end are presented, as well as

recommendations to Member States to create the necessary conditions to allow venture capital to develop. Three main points that are needed for Europe are stressed:

- More growth through risk capital investments;
- More bank finance for innovation;
- Better governance.

The challenge is now to implement these recommendations. The Commission intends to monitor progress on SME finance and provide a first report in 2009.

The Communication on the financing of SMEs can be found under:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com2006_0349en01.pdf

ERAWATCH: Monitoring science policy in Europe

A new service was launched on 9 October by DG Research and the Joint Research Centre in Sevilla, IPTS: ERAWATCH will allow to directly compare the research systems, programmes and policies of different countries. It covers not only the EU Member States and the two candidates Bulgaria and Romania, but also the EEA countries, Switzerland, Israel, Turkey, China, Japan and the USA. ERAWATCH will include, amongst other:

- An overview of each country's research policies;
- An explanation on how the system works;
- Details of research programmes;
- Research performance.

This site, which for the first time allows obtaining harmonised information on the research system of these countries, will certainly be a precious tool for policy makers and researchers.

ERAWATCH can be found under:

<http://cordis.europa.eu/erawatch/>

Eurobarometer survey on biotechnology

On 19 June, the latest in a series of Eurobarometer on biotechnology was published. According to this survey, 52% of those polled indicated a belief that biotechnology will improve their quality of life. Most Europeans are apparently in favour of medical (also called "red") and industrial ("white") applications of biotechnology, when there are clear benefits to health. The applications of agricultural ("green") biotech seem to cause more scepticism. However, there is support for research using stem cells. Confidence in the EU's regulation of biotechnology has increased, and in general, optimism about biotechnology has grown significantly since 1999.

The results of the Eurobarometer survey are available under:

<http://www.ec.europa.eu/research/press/2006/pr1906en.cfm>

Brochure on the European Research Council (ERC)

The European Commission has recently published a brochure presenting the ERC, detailing its mission and launch strategy. Moreover, the 22 members of the Scientific Council are pictured in the brochure, with a short summary of their awards and titles.

The brochure on the ERC can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/erc/pdf/erc-brochure_en.pdf

SwissCore Küche

SwissCore Annual Event

On 11 July, as every year, SwissCore had once again the pleasure to host its Annual Event. It is the opportunity for SwissCore to thank its Brussels partners for their good collaboration over the past year.

This year's event was hosted by Christiane Langenberger, President of the Board of Euresearch and a member of the Council of States of the Swiss Parliament. In her address, she summarised the current discussions going on in Switzerland concerning the state budget to be allocated for research, education and innovation. Several Swiss parliamentarians would like to go beyond the 4.5% annual growth in this part of the budget proposed by the Federal Council; Mrs. Langenberger has deposited a motion asking for at least 6% growth. Moreover, she underscored the importance of opening Swiss science towards Europe, mainly through the association of Switzerland to the 7th Framework Programme.



Swiss Science Briefing discussed innovation policy

Under the title “Magic measures to foster innovation? Lessons learnt from an OECD evaluation” SwissCore and the Swiss Mission to the EC invited their Brussels counterparts and European Commission officials on 13 September to a discussion on how to best encourage innovation at the regional, national and European level.

The new Director of the Swiss Commission for Technology and Innovation (CTI), Christoph Caviezel, gave first insights into a study of the OECD on the Swiss innovation system, which is to be published in November this year. This study presents Switzerland as a high innovation performer, while also pointing at impediments in the Swiss innovation system. As Mr. Caviezel pointed out, Switzerland suffers from a “lack of dynamism”, which is additionally hampered by the low level of public spending for research and development. He presented measures the CTI is already taking to palliate to those deficiencies, for example an initiative to bring industry and academia together in order to better identify supply and demand needs.

In his reply to Mr. Caviezel's presentation, Pierre Vigier, from DG Enterprise of the European Commission, presented the measures the EU is taking to foster innovation, and pointed to the new Communication on Innovation, which was published by the Commission on that same day (see article above).

This successful event (around 80 participants) was therefore coming just at the right time to discuss a subject which has been gaining in actuality in the past months, as shown by the above-mentioned Communication on innovation and the recent discussions around the setting up of a European Institute for Technology (see article above).



Christoph Caviezel



Pierre Vigier

SwissCore Seminar on 23-24 November

The 2006 edition of the SwissCore Seminar will take place on 23-24 November in Brussels. This year's main focus will naturally be on the forthcoming FP7. Participants will get first hand information on the latest developments of the programme from European Commission officials, especially the details pertaining to its implementation, as well as numerous opportunities for networking. In addition, the Commission's new project for a European Institute of Technology will be presented.

The programme of the seminar will be as follows:

Thursday 23 November 2006

9:00-17:00

Welcome and introduction

Danièle Rod Wiesner, SwissCore

Current status of FP7

Clara de la Torre, DG Research

"Ideas": The European Research Council

Christine Simon, DG Research

Possibilities for international cooperation

Rainer Schulte, DG Research

"People": Marie Curie Fellowships

Georges Bingen, DG Research

"Capacities"

Dan Andrée, DG Research

Networking apéro and dinner

Friday 24 November 2006

9:00-15:30

Legal and financial issues

Sebastian Winkler, DG Research

Implementing FP7: practicalities and procedures

Graham Stroud, DG Research

European Institute of Technology

Matteo Bonifacio, DG Education and Culture

Wrap-up

Danièle Rod Wiesner, SwissCore

To register to the Seminar and for further information, please do not hesitate to contact SwissCore at: infodesk@swisscore.org