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Seen from Brussels

Decision on several initiatives still pending

The past two months, the debate on the establishment of a European Institute of Technology (EIT) has intensified. At the recent informal Competitiveness Council (Council of Ministers) in Würzburg on 26-28 April, the two-step proposal of the German Presidency (see Synopsis 2006/1) was well received by the Member States, while the European Parliament has held a public hearing on the EIT on May 2. After the presentation of a rather negative report in the relevant Committee in April, the responses of the different stakeholders invited to the hearing were more balanced (see p. 6). It currently looks as if a decision of principle on the EIT could be taken before the end of the German Presidency in June.

Contrary to previous announcements, the European Commission has not yet adopted any of the highly expected first batch of proposals for the Joint Technology Initiatives (JTI). This delay seems to be due to legalistic problems and governance issues with some of the JTI projects. It is now planned that the proposal for a JTI on Innovative Medicines (IMI), would be tabled on 10 May. The proposal for a JTI on embedded systems, ARTEMIS, could be adopted on the same day, while the proposals for the nanoelectronics JTI ENIAC and the aeronautics JTI Clean Sky could be tabled as early as 13 June.

The proposals for joint programmes under Art. 169 are currently in the same situation: some technical and legal problems are currently being addressed by the relevant Directorates within the European Commission. The Eurostars and the Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) projects are however supposed to be tabled before summer.

Research
7th Framework Programme (FP7)

The future of the European Technology Platforms

On 10 April, the 3rd status report on the European Technology Platforms (ETP) was published by a dedicated Inter-Service Group of the European Commission. This group, composed of members of different Directorates-General (DG), examined the status of the 31 currently existing ETPs and made a set of recommendations for the future orientation of these platforms.

Technology platforms are industry-led forums of enterprises working in a specific sector. These industries get together to define their medium- to long-term research needs, resulting in the publication of a Strategic Research Agenda (SRA). As shown in the report, these SRA are taken into consideration by the European Commission when drafting the annual Work Programmes of the different FP7 Themes and the ETPs themselves are also consulted during this process. This allows orienting the planned research also in line with the needs of the industrial sector in Europe. As a result, the ETPs have become a kind of advisory body for DG Research.

The ETP status report draws an overall positive conclusion from the progress made in the last year, as most of the 31 ETPs have brought together the relevant stakeholders, reached a consensus on a common vision and established an SRA. A set of recommendations to maximise the impact of ETPs have emerged from a dedicated conference in Vienna last year, and are laid out in the report:

- ETPs should focus on areas which address major European challenges;
- Proliferation of platforms should be avoided and cross-platform interactions increased;
- ETPs should commit to openness and transparency and involve a broad range of stakeholders, including SMEs and civil society organisations;
- Coordination between ETPs and national/regional authorities (e.g. through “mirror groups”) should be encouraged;

- Possibilities of common actions with other programmes (e.g. structural funds, EUREKA) should be explored;
- Sources of financing other than FP7 (e.g. Regional Funds, European Investment Bank) should be tapped, as the amounts needed to implement the SRA of the ETPs clearly exceed the financial capacity of FP7;
- Effective governance structures should be developed by the ETPs.

Beyond these recommendations, the Commission expects the role of the ETPs to evolve from defining strategic priorities for R&D to contributing to set the framework under which these investments will provide higher returns for the European economy. In this context, the ETPs were for example asked to propose specific actions to develop "lead markets" in Europe. The definition of lead market initiatives is one of the priorities of the Commission's innovation strategy adopted last year (see Synopsis 2006/4). The focus of the ETPs is therefore likely to shift more from research and development to innovation in the future.

The 3rd status report on European Technology Platforms can be found here:
ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/technology-platforms/docs/etp3rdreport_en.pdf

Massive response to the first ERC call

The first call ever of the newly established European Research Council (ERC) (see Synopsis 2007/1) was closed as planned on 25 April. On that same day, the ERC also released the complete list of the panel members which will evaluate the received proposals. Until the deadline, the ERC Dedicated Implementing Structure (Executive Agency) had received 9167 applications for an ERC Starting Grant. This massive amount of proposals from young scientists from all over Europe and beyond is three times higher than what had been predicted by the Scientific Council (ScC) of the ERC. A broad classification of the received proposals showed following distribution in the three main scientific domains of the ERC:

- Physical sciences and engineering: 46%;
- Life sciences including medicine: 37%;
- Social sciences and humanities: 17%.

These numbers correspond well with the budget pre-allocations the ScC had defined in the Work Programme 2007, 45%, 40% and 15% respectively. The number of panels in every domain had also been planned accordingly, with 8, 7 and 5 panels of 10-12 panel members each.
These estimations of topic distribution, albeit accurate, can however not compensate for the large amount of received applications. Indeed, unless a large amount of the 8-page outline proposals can be eliminated during the eligibility check, each of the panel members will have to deal with an average of 100 applications. Consequently, the panellists might be tempted to give more weight to a flashy publication list than to an original proposal, whose potential is buried inside 4 pages of complex scientific descriptions. The number of received applications might have to be contained in the future if the goal of the ScC to identify real "frontier" research, and not just "efficient" research, needs to be met.

The list of the ERC Starting Grant Panel members can be found under:
http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/stg-panel-members-26042007_en.pdf

A place for the Humanities in FP7

On 23 April, the final report of the Expert Group on the Humanities (EGH) on the positioning of the humanities in FP7 was published by the European Commission. This Expert Group was convened by DG Research to assess to what extent the FP instruments were adapted to the disciplines and fields in the humanities, how the key concepts of EU collaborative research could be better understood by humanities researchers and to advise DG Research on the formulation of the Work Programme for FP7's Theme 8, "Socio-economic sciences and humanities". To improve the inclusion of the humanities into FP7, the EGH formulated a series of recommendations in its report:

- The description of topics in the Work Programmes should be more humanities friendly;
- DG Research should showcase successful applications submitted by humanities-led consortia;
- The link between innovative research and policy-relevant outcomes should be clearly demonstrated in the dissemination of project results;
- Theme 8 should be implemented as a dynamic, developing process;
- DG Research should take note of new research proposals originating from the field of education when relevant for the Lisbon Agenda;
- A stronger effort to arouse the interest of humanities researchers in other Themes of FP7 is needed;
- Funding levels for humanities research should be reconsidered;
- Opportunities to train young researchers in collaborative, policy-oriented research in international contexts should be created;
- Specific institutes designed to encourage such international, policy-oriented research should be created across Europe;
- Dedicated paid internships at European Institutions should be offered to young humanities researchers;
- A more permanent Expert Group on Humanities should be set up;
- DG Research should strengthen and coordinate its outreach activities;
- Humanities disciplines should be represented on all evaluation panels in Theme 8.

The report "Positioning Humanities Research in the 7th Framework Programme" can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/egh_final_report_2007_en.pdf

EU Research Policy

Review of the EU strategy on life sciences and biotechnology
On 10 April 2007, the European Commission published the mid-term review of the Strategy on Life Sciences and Biotechnology 2002-2010. The review presents a refocus of the actions that had been proposed in the Strategy adopted in 2002, whose scope had been originally very broad.
The mid-term review acknowledges the importance of the European biotechnology industry, which employs 96500 people, mostly in SMEs. Moreover, 44% of these employees are involved in R&D activities, making it one of the most research-intensive sectors. A study of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) published concomitantly with the mid-term review estimates that the production and use of modern biotechnology results in a gross added value of 1.69% of the EU economy and contributes to an increase of labour productivity by 10-20%. Moreover, a recent Eurobarometer survey (see Synopsis 2006/4) showed widespread support for medical and industrial applications of biotechnology; the results were however more negative on genetically modified (GM) foods (58% against).
In the view of the facts and findings of the JRC's report, the European Commission refocused its Strategy on the following five points:

- Promote research and market development for life sciences and biotechnology: Besides the already running FP7, the Commission intends to mobilise public and private funding and reinforce the coordination of research. This will notably be done through the implementation of the Joint Technology Initiative (JTI) on Innovative Medicines (IMI). Schemes to support pilot plants and lead market initiatives in the area of eco-efficient bio-based products are also planned.
- Foster competitiveness, knowledge transfer and innovation from the science base to industry: Licensing of genetic inventions, promotion of knowledge transfer, facilitation of the patenting

system for SMEs, specific rules and/or incentives for young innovative companies and the development of clusters are foreseen under this heading.

- Encourage the societal debates on the benefits and risks of life sciences and biotechnology: Structures and initiatives for a closer dialogue as well as for the anticipation of possible ethical and socio-economic impacts of emerging scientific issues will be put in place.
- Ensure a sustainable contribution of modern biotechnology to agriculture: The main purpose is to address the co-existence of GM and conventional crops and the assessment of long-term effects of GM foods.
- Improve the implementation of the legislation and its impact on competitiveness: Monitoring of the Strategy, foresight activities and the improvement of policy coordination are foreseen here.

With this review of the Strategy on life sciences and biotechnology, the Commission intends to support the development of a strong "Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy (KBBE)" in Europe and to close the gap between the productivity of the European biotech industry and its US counterpart.

The Commission's Communication on the mid-term review of the Strategy on Life Sciences and Biotechnology can be found here:
http://ec.europa.eu/biotechnology/docs/com_2007_175_en.pdf

The JRC's study "Biotechnology for Europe (Bio4EU)" can be found under:
http://bio4eu.jrc.es/documents/Bio4EUsynthesisreportEUR22728EN.pdf

Publications

Consultation on the ERA now open
On 1 May, as planned, the European Commission opened the consultation on the new perspectives of the European Research Area (ERA). This wide consultation of all stakeholders in the field of European research is based on the recently published Green Paper on the ERA (see Synopsis 2007/2) and will last until 31 August 2007. The online questionnaire of the consultation on the ERA will be accessible until this date under:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/consultation-era_en.html

eHealth progress report
On 10 April, the European Commission's DG for Information Society (DG INFSO) published a report on the progress towards improved healthcare through innovative information technology-based solutions in different European countries (EU27 plus EFTA Countries and Turkey). The European eHealth Action Plan, which was published by the Commission in April 2004, invited the Member States to "develop a national or regional roadmap for eHealth" and the current report analyses these different roadmaps and progresses made towards their proposed goals. The material for this report was collected, reviewed and collated by the partners in the Coordination Action "eHealth ERA", whose mission is to support and publicize the definition of the national or regional eHealth roadmaps. This publication might certainly be of use for health care professionals looking for project partners in different European countries.

The report "eHealth priorities and strategies in European countries" can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/health/docs/policy/ehealth-era-full-report.pdf

More information on "eHealth ERA" can be found under:
http://www.ehealth-era.org/

i2010 report
On 30 March, the European Commission's DG for Information Society (DG INFSO) published the second annual report on the i2010 strategy, which was originally launched in June 2005. i2010 is

the Commission's initiative to ensure coherence across information society and media policies and to reinforce the contribution of ICT technologies to the Lisbon Strategy.
The report, which was compiled with the inputs of the i2010 High Level Group and the ICT Task Force, draws an overall positive picture from the activities implemented in 2006 and will serve as a basis for a more extensive review of the i2010 initiative in 2008.
In the field of research and innovation, the report underscores the importance of the FP7, especially the soon-to-be-launched Joint Technology Initiatives (JTI) in the ICT field. In addition, the ICT Policy Support Programme (ICT PSP) of the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) should also contribute to a better uptake of ICT technologies by citizens, governments and businesses, in particular SMEs. The measures that will be undertaken by the Commission in the years 2007-2008 for research and innovation are:

- Proposals for the JTIs ARTEMIS (embedded systems) and ENIAC (nanoelectronics);
- Review of the standardisation for ICT;
- Assessment of the potential of pre-commercial procurement;
- Policy coordination for ICT uptake, review of eBusiness policies and definition of newly required policy measures.

The second annual report on the i2010 strategy can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/docs/annual_report/2007/comm_pdf_com_2007_0146_f_en_acte.pdf

Innovation

Some progress in the discussion on the EIT
At the informal Competitiveness Council (Council of Ministers) on 26-28 April in Würzburg, the Research Ministers of the EU Member States discussed the proposal made by the German Presidency on the European Institute of Technology (EIT). According to this proposal, the EIT would have a two-level structure: a Governing Board which identifies important fields of science, selects universities and research institutions and distributes financial support to so-called Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), formed by the chosen research institutions. The KICs will be networks between universities, research institutions and industry and will focus on particular topics (see Synopsis 2007/1).
Then on 2 May, Members of the European Parliament (MEP) discussed the EIT project with various experts from universities and research organisations in a joint hearing of Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) and the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT). The main points of this hearing were:

- Funding of the EIT: About €308 million should be invested by the Commission to start with the EIT. It is unclear to which degree business will participate. There was a consensus that the contribution from the private business enterprise sector is essential for the project, but there where different opinions whether industry should participate from the beginning or whether it is sufficient if it boards the ship at a later stage. The Commission assessed the costs for the EIT to about €2,4 billion for the period 2008-2013. Nevertheless, the structures for financing the EIT still remain a blackbox. In the hearing it was criticised that the €308 million will be taken from the unallocated budget margins as the EIT has not been envisaged in the Community's Financial Perspectives 2008-2013. It was also criticised that about €1,5 billion will be taken from other programs (FP, CIP) and from regional and structural funds, which will limit the scope for other (regional) actions.
- Knowledge and Innovation Community (KICs): At the beginning two KICs are planned, but the topics to be chosen are still debated. Commission President Barroso as well as German Chancellor Merkel are keen on the energy and climate change topics, whereas some countries like Finland would prefer more economically oriented topics like medical engineering or information and communication technology. It was also argued that the KICs should be created under private law. Some experts wanted to start with more than

two KICs, but additional KICs will most likely be created in a second step, becoming operational only after 2013.

- EIT with regard to other initiatives: Numerous speakers pointed out that actions planned under the umbrella of the EIT could often not clearly be distinguished from already existing EU initiatives, such as parts of FP 7 (Joint Technology Initiatives, ERC) or CIP, but also on the level of countries and regions. There is a risk of duplication of existing structures. According to the participants of the hearing, the success of the EIT depends essentially from its capacity to be different from other actions, some of them asking which will be the added value of the EIT compared to existing programs.
- Autonomy of the EIT: One of the keywords often heard at the hearing was trust. The EIT is considered to be a quite risky plan, but politicians should be courageous and not intend to control the EIT too much. Indeed, if the best researchers are selected the EIT will work autonomously, according to some hearing participants. Nevertheless, clear and measurable goals should be set by politicians.
- Geographical limits: There was a wide consensus in the hearing that it would not be appropriate to limit the EIT to Europe. The EIT should be open to the world and attract researchers from overseas and money from non-European companies.
- Roadmap for the EIT: A decision of general principle should be taken until the end of the German presidency and could be reached in the Competitiveness Council (Council of Ministers) in June. The MEPs and the experts present at the hearing agreed that the time has come to put into practice the plan of an EIT.

Despite the open points expressed at the hearing, it seems that the European Parliament is currently moving closer to the Council of Ministers on these questions and the goal to take a decision on the EIT before the end of the German Presidency seems to be more reachable than previously foreseen.

The Commission's new proposals for patent litigations

In both the EU and Switzerland particular attention is currently given to the protection of intellectual property. In Switzerland, the ongoing revision of the Patent Act intends amongst others the creation of a Federal Patent Court. This suggestion underlines the importance which is given to the protection of intellectual property as a crucial factor of competitiveness.

On the European level, in a Communication published on 3 April the European Commission stressed once more the need to improve the patent system and to create a single market for patents. The new patent system in Europe should become more accessible and bring cost saving for everybody as filing a patent is currently much more expensive as in the US or Japan. Due to fragmentation, patenting costs are 11 times higher in Europe than in the US. In this perspective a Community patent could be the solution which brings down the price for patenting, even if the translation costs might still be high and the proposed jurisdictional system would bring an excessive centralisation.

Until now, the European Patent Office (EPO) provides European patents, using a single procedure, but afterwards European patents become subject of national rules, which means the involvement of a multitude of legal systems in case of patent conflicts. With the European Litigation Agreement (EPLA), the EPO planned a single unified system for settling patent disputes. This project, supported by Switzerland, aims at the creation of a limited number of Courts of First Instance and of a centralised Appeal Court. This system would however not be under the administration of the EU and could only cover disputes in relation with the future European Patent. Some Member States therefore call for the creation of a special EU court with the responsibility for settling patent disputes for both the European Patent and the future Community Patent. Such a unified system might however not be able to include EPO countries which are not member of the EU, like Switzerland.

The Commission's communication suggests the creation of an EU-wide jurisdictional system for patents, which would combine elements of the EPLA but also of a specific Community jurisdiction for patent litigation based on the EC Treaty. This would lead to the build-up of a single EU-wide court system for patent litigations (a central court and a number of first instance courts spread

across the EU). As this proposal means at least in part the creation of a common court for patent litigations, Switzerland would have to discuss its participation to this system with the Commission.
Intellectual property rights were also one of the topics discussed by the Research Ministers at the Competitiveness Council (Council of Ministers) in Würzburg on 26-28 April. A German initiative for a Charter for the management of intellectual property from public research institutions and universities was widely accepted. On that basis, the Council will establish a proposition to the Commission for a code of conduct on IPR before June. This code could be used on a voluntary basis to build trust between universities and industry when it comes to sharing intellectual property.

The Communication on enhancing the patent system in Europe is available under:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0165en01.pdf

Improving knowledge transfer between academia and industry
In order to improve Europe's innovation capacities and its competitiveness, knowledge transfer between public research institutions and industry plays a crucial role. In a Communication on 4 April the European Commission focuses on knowledge transfer and identifies several obstacles such as cultural differences between the business and the science communities, legal barriers, lack of incentives and fragmented markets for knowledge and technology. The Commission recognises the efforts made by several Member States to encourage knowledge transfer with the aim to fulfil the Lisbon goals. However it points out that most of these initiatives are designed in a rather national perspective and can therefore not respond to the need for more interaction between academia and industry on a trans-national level.
In order to find an appropriate answer to the question on how the knowledge flow could be improved the Commission underlines that research institutions in general need to be more active in promoting their knowledge to industry. From its point of view there is a cultural gap between universities and industry and therefore it suggests some actions to reduce that distance. The Commission recognises that research institutions need to have well formed and experienced staff working on knowledge transfer. Personnel appointed to that kind of tasks should posses a wide range of know-how and should actively pursue links with industry. The pooling of Intellectual Property (IP) from different research institutions would also facilitate the interaction between academia and business. In this respect the Innovation Relay Centres (IRC) based in 33 countries create a trans-European network in order to improve the technology flow between universities and industry in Europe. Another measure mentioned by the Commission is the advancement of entrepreneurial mindset and the providing of relevant skills to researcher, such as IP management. One action in this regard could be the movement of staff between research institutions and industry. The European Institute of Technology (EIT) is supposed to make an important contribution in bringing together industry and research institutions. With regard to financial facilities the Commission notes the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) or the EC Framework Programmes for research & development (FP) and for competitiveness & innovation (CIP). Particularly SMEs should have priority in the promotion of knowledge transfer. Finally, the exchange of good practice in support of knowledge transfer between governments should be more promoted and a monitoring system should be established to measure the success of the actions taken.

The Commission's Communication on knowledge transfer can be found under:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0182en01.pdf

From airbag sensors to eco-friendly plastics - European Inventors of the Year awarded
The European Commission Vice-President Günther Verheugen and the President of the European Patent Office (EPO) Alain Pompidou awarded the European Inventors of the Year 2007 in Munich on 18 April. The four winners stand for the categories Industry, SMEs, Non-European countries and Lifetime achievement. They were chosen by a highly qualified jury after

a pre-selection by the EPO's 3'500 patent examiners. Only inventions patented at EPO between 1992 and 2001 and which resulted in remarkable innovations were taken into consideration.

- The prize in the SME category went to a team of Italian scientists which developed biodegradable plastics. One of the main uses of this invention can be seen in the creation of shopping bags which decompose naturally within a period of three to eight weeks.
- The industry prize went to Germany and honoured the inventors of the so called Bosch process to build high-precision silicon sensors for airbags.
- In the non-European category American scientists were awarded for developing one of the most successful treatments currently available for HIV.
- Prof Marc Feldmann (UK) finally won the award in the category Lifetime Achievement for discovering a treatment used to cure autoimmune diseases.

Further information about the European Inventor of the Year Awards can be found under:
http://www.european-inventor.org/

Education

Vision for higher education beyond 2010

The European University Association (EUA) organised its 4th EUA Convention in Lisbon on 29-31 March 2007.

The EUA, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

The theme of the convention was "The future of higher education beyond 2010" and the opening session brought together speakers from different parts of the world to compare their views on future developments in higher education. At the meeting, Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso underlined the increasing importance of universities in meeting Europe's goals.

Five themes from a wealth of recommendations which resulted from the convention – internationalisation, research, quality, funding and change – are incorporated into EUA's own Lisbon Declaration, to be presented to the ministers of the 46 countries of the Bologna process in London on 17-18 May 2007.

More information on the EUA' Convention can be found under: http://www.euaconvention.org

The EUA's Lisbon Declaration is published under:
http://www.eua.be/index.php?id=48&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=305&tx_ttnews[backPid]=1

More information about the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education in London can be found under: http://www.livegroup.co.uk/bologna/

First European Investigation into linguistic competencies in the EU Member States

In a Communication adopted on 13 April, the European Commission proposes conducting the first European survey to test the language skills in the first and second foreign languages of pupils having completed their compulsory schooling. This Communication takes stock from the 2000 Lisbon European Council, which underlined the importance of improving Europeans' language skills.

The Council of Ministers is expected to adopt this Communication during its Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting on 24-25 May 2007, thereby allowing the Commission to launch the survey in all member states in the beginning of 2009.

Further information can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/languages_en.html

EU-Australia Education Cooperation
From 16-19 April, Jan Figel, the European Commissioner in charge of Education, visited Australia and signed a joint declaration in order to improve educational ties between the European Commission and the Government of Australia. The ultimate goal is to make the education systems of both continents more compatible with each other. In his meetings with Ministers Julie Bishop and Andrew Robb, Commissioner Figel discussed bilateral cooperation, the modernisation of higher education, the Bologna and Copenhagen processes and the European Institute of Technology.

More information about the EU-Australia Cooperation in Higher Education and Vocational Training can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/eu_others/australia/index_en.html

Erasmus celebrates 20 years breaking records of participation
The university exchange programme Erasmus continued to expand in the academic year 2005/06. The overall number of students taking part on Erasmus exchanges rose by over 7%, while the number of university teachers exchanged grew by over 12%. Most of the 31 participating countries experienced a growth of incoming mobility whereas the figures for outgoing mobility were more varied. The most distinctive increases in student and teacher mobility were observed in the Member States that joined the EU in 2004.
Swiss statistics do not appear in the European Commission data as Switzerland is currently not associated to the Erasmus programme. Swiss students have continuously been participating since 1996/97, but were financed by the Swiss government.

Further information can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/erasmus_en.html

SwissCore Küche

Swiss networking in Brussels: 13th SwissCore apéro
For its traditional networking apéro, SwissCore welcomed on 17 April 2007 around 20 newly arrived and more established Swiss expats working for European institutions, lobby organisations or the media. The new Head of Office of SwissCore, Maryline Maillard, and the new Science Counsellor of the Swiss Mission to the EU, Balz Abplanalp, presented their activities to reinforce the presence and the visibility of Switzerland in the field of research, education and innovation in Brussels. As usual, this was the opportunity to network amongst Swiss actors in Brussels, but also to give those who are soon returning to Switzerland a flavour of how Swiss institutions can network and lobby in the European capital.