

SwissCore Synopsis

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♦ Seen from Brussels

Joint Technology Initiatives on the trial seat

After the usually quiet summer, the European Commission has picked up its cruising speed again. Next to a series of Communications in the fields of innovation (p.8) and education (p.10), the long-awaited proposal for an initiative under Art.169 to support research-performing SMEs (Eurostars, p.3) and a solution for the financing of two of the Commission's most prominent flagship initiatives, Galileo and the European Institute of Technology (EIT), were tabled (p.8) The regulation establishing the EIT has been voted by the plenary of the European Parliament on 26 September; with only slight modifications to the text adopted by the ITRE Committee on 9 July (see Synopsis 2007/6). It is now up to the Council of the European Union to make the adoption in a single reading a reality; a decision is expected before the end of the year. This would allow the first part of the EIT, the Governing Board, to be set up at the beginning of 2008, with the first KICs following in 2009. Nevertheless, the joint financing of Galileo and the EIT remains a debated issue.

The Joint Technology Initiatives currently face the opposite problem. Whereas everyone agrees on the financing of the four currently debated proposals, problems have surfaced concerning the legal status of the Joint Undertakings that, according to Art.171, have to be established for these JTI. It seems that the Council agrees to set up the JTI as Community Bodies, but wants to restrict the rights of so-called Third Parties (the participating industry associations, but also all the Associated Countries like Switzerland) in these structures. The European Parliament, which only has a consultative role in the adoption of the proposals, would prefer a lighter and more flexible structure with less administrative burdens. The Commission is taking the middle ground by stating that the Community Bodies to be established would still have the necessary flexibility to respond to industry's needs. While this issue could easily be solved by finding an adequate compromise, it is to fear that a lengthy debate might put off the involved industry associations. This could jeopardise the setting up of the JTIs and would cast an unfavourable light on Art.171 of the EU Treaty, already stained by the debacle of the Galileo public-private partnership. It is to hope that a solution will rapidly be found, so that the four first JTIs can be started at the beginning of 2008.

♦ Research

7th Framework Programme (FP7)

ERC: Details on the Advanced Grants

On 17 September, the Scientific Council of the European Research Council (ERC) transmitted to the European Commission the "Ideas" Work Programme for 2008. Two types of calls for proposals are planned to be issued in mid-November 2007:

- A call for the ERC Advanced Grants (AdG): As for the Starting Grants (StG), this scheme provides support to individual investigators (and their team) working on a project in any field at the frontier of knowledge, with excellence as the sole evaluation criterion. The size of the grants is higher than for the StG, amounting to maximum €2.5 million for 5 years, but the funding levels are the same (100% + 20% overhead). Besides the three main research domains already defined for the StG (Physical Sciences and Engineering, Life Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities), there will be a fourth domain called "interdisciplinary and High-risk/High-gain Frontier Research". In addition, the submission and evaluation procedure will differ substantially from the one of the StG:
 - The submission will be done in one stage only, but proposals will be evaluated in two steps. First, the evaluators will assess the "scientific leadership profile" and the "track record" (see below) of the principal investigator, as well as a short synopsis of the proposal. The full proposals will only be evaluated if the candidates pass this first stage.

- The submission deadline will depend on which panel the proposal is submitted to; there will be 5 different deadlines, spread out between 26 February and 4 June 2008.
- The “10-year track record” should comprise either 10 publications in major international peer-reviewed journals, or 3 monographs (of which at least one is translated into another language). If appropriate, alternative benchmarks might also be considered (patents, conferences, prizes, expeditions). This track record, together with the leadership profile (but without the project synopsis!) might be used to pre-screen the proposals if the application numbers are too high. The publication record is therefore gaining a lot of weight in the selection for the AdG.
- A call for ERC Coordination and Support Actions (CSA), with a deadline on 26 February 2008. A Support Action with a budget of €2.5 million is foreseen for projects on preparatory studies addressing the impact of the ERC on the European research environment, as well as proposals for the development of novel and innovative methods for the assessment and evaluation of the ERC’s impact. This call for proposals will be complemented by a call for tender of €500’000 for the onset of data collection.

Besides these two calls, €300’000 will go to named beneficiaries, to support the work of the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the ERC Scientific Council.

All the above calls will be covered by the ERC’s budget for 2008 and 2009. As a result, no principal investigator can be associated with more than one proposal in calls falling in this period.

Proposal for the Eurostars joint programme is out

On 13 September, the European Commission (EC) tabled the proposal for Eurostars, a joint undertaking with EUREKA which would be set up under Article 169 of the Treaty. Eurostars aims at supporting research projects undertaken by SMEs. Projects should have a rather short duration and should already be close to market realization. 22 EU Member States (all except the UK, Slovakia, Malta, Luxembourg and Bulgaria) and 5 Associated Countries which are members of EUREKA (Iceland, Israel, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey) agreed to co-finance Eurostars with a contribution amounting to €300 million for the six-year running time of the programme. The part of the Commission will be taken from the “Capacities” programme of FP7 and will amount to €100 million, so that public funding will reach €400 in total. The main features of the Eurostars programme are:

- The contribution of the European Commission to each project is limited to 25% of the contribution coming from the countries (at an earlier stage it was planned to be 30%).
- At least two independent partners from different countries have to be involved in a project. To define a research-performing SME, Eurostars will follow the guidelines of the European Commission. In addition, SMEs eligible for Eurostars should have their own research facilities.
- The core part of the research should be performed by SMEs, but involvement of research institutes, universities or larger enterprises is also possible. Each project must be coordinated by an SME and at least 50% of the project resources have to be allocated to SMEs.
- The evaluation of projects would be conducted centrally in a two-step approach and the final ranking list would be binding for all countries involved.
- Each country will finance its participants according to their national rules (e.g. Swiss SMEs will be supported by Switzerland according to the rules used by the Commission for Technology and Innovation, CTI). Surprisingly, the proposal allows the provision of loans instead of grants. In that case, the Commission’s contribution to the project would be calculated according to a standard equivalence model.

The EUREKA Secretariat in Brussels would be responsible for the execution of Eurostars (issuing of calls, receipt of proposals and organisation of evaluation) and for the distribution of the EC contribution. A Eurostars High Level Group would be responsible for the monitoring of the programme and would approve the final ranking list; the European Commission takes part in that group, but only as an observer. Finally, a Eurostars Advisory Group consisting of EUREKA National Project Coordinators (NPC) from the countries participating in Eurostars would monitor

the project and advise the Secretariat. The Advisory Group would also play an important role in the synchronisation between the central and national procedures.

The proposal for the Eurostars joint programme can be found here:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0514en01.pdf

For further information about Eurostars:

<http://www.eurostars-eureka.eu/faq.do>

Discussions in Parliament on the implementation of FP7

On 13 September, the Committee for Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) of the European Parliament held an exchange of views with the European Commission's Director-General for Research, J.M. Silva Rodriguez, concerning the implementation of the 7th Research Framework Programme (FP7). This meeting had been called by the Chair of ITRE, Ms Niebler, who, during last year's somewhat heated debate on the FP7 Rules of Participation, had warned the Commission that the Parliament would keep a close eye on the implementation of the research programme.

During the meeting, Mr Silva Rodriguez presented an overview on the state of play of FP7 and answered some of the questions by members of ITRE, for example on the following topics:

- Simplifications: Mr Silva Rodriguez stated that internal rules for lighter monitoring and reporting, together with strengthened audits, are currently being implemented.
- Single point of assistance: about 5000 questions have already been submitted, which seem to have generally been answered well and in time.
- Evaluations: new evaluation facilities have been made available, or will be shortly. The quality of the evaluations was a point that was stressed by several members of ITRE and some doubts arose concerning the competence of some of the evaluators. Surprisingly, Mr Silva Rodriguez pointed to the new redress procedure (see below) in this context...
- Redress procedure: this new process in FP7 seems to be running well; 400 complaints, representing about 5% of all applicants, have been processed by the Commission's internal complaints committee. Re-evaluations were however only performed in exceptional cases.
- Participation of SMEs: this popular topic was discussed in great detail; Mr Silva Rodriguez pointed to the specific calls for SMEs in the different Work Programmes and to the Guarantee Fund, which should ease participation of small companies.
- European Research Council: in response to the many questions concerning the ERC, the Director-General stated that the independence of the ERC is absolute and proposed that ITRE invite the Chair of the Scientific Council for more information on the internal functioning of the ERC. In the same strike, he asked for ITRE's support for the two Executive Agencies (the ERC Agency and the FP7 Implementation Agency) that DG Research wants to set up. However, the members of ITRE did not share his enthusiasm and Ms Niebler stated that they would examine the proposal very closely.

To summarise, Mr Silva Rodriguez delivered his vision of FP7 in a couple of catchy phrases, stating that the programme needs "effective evaluation, light reporting and strong audits" to succeed, and that European research is moving towards Joint Technology Initiatives led by industry and frontier research funded by a fully independent ERC.

As a follow-up, ITRE is planning to organise a meeting in November with the ERC Scientific Council Chairman, Mr Kafatos.

EU Research Policy

The views of the ERC Scientific Council on the European Research Area

On 31 August, the Scientific Council (ScC) of the European Research Council (ERC) published its opinion on the Green Paper on the revision of the European Research Area, to answer the request of Research Commissioner J. Potocnik.

This document goes well beyond a simple position paper. The first part consists of a review of the current state of the ERC. In the opinion of the ScC, the creation of the ERC represents a logical step in the evolution of the EU's science policy and stands as a model for other parts of the Research Framework Programme.

The second part of the document details some of the opinions of the ScC on parts of the European research system, like open access to scientific information, the modernisation of universities and the role of research infrastructures. Interestingly, for this last point, the ScC proposes to create an independent European agency for research infrastructures based on the model of the ERC.

Finally, the ScC also details a series of brief recommendations for the further development of the ERA:

- Establish an autonomous ERC: according to the ScC, the establishment of an “ERC-specific Executive Agency with the appropriate flexibility, openness and autonomy from the Commission” is far from being realised.
- Extend the principle of autonomy to other areas: the aforementioned autonomy should generally feed into the further development of the EU research programmes. What the ScC means by this is somewhat cryptic; indeed, the “autonomous” managing of policy-driven, top-down research programmes, like most parts of the Framework Programme are, is somewhat hard to imagine...
- Increase research resources in Europe: the ScC especially points out the funding needs of research infrastructures in some European countries.
- Promote the synergy and complementarity of research and training systems: under this heading, the ScC actually makes a series of very concrete proposals:
 - A postdoctoral training programme at European level should be set up by the EU, modelled on the one of the European Molecular Biology Organisation (EMBO); indeed, the Marie Curie Program is judged too rigid by the ScC.
 - Simplification should be pursued in all parts of FP7, based on the simplified procedures of the ERC. It is worth mentioning here that these “simplified ERC procedures” have not yet stood the test of time, as no contracts have so far been signed...
 - Languages do represent a European asset for the ScC, despite its proposal to introduce English as the standard language for application and evaluation.
- Improve connections between frontier research and innovation: the ScC sees a major contribution from frontier research to innovation in Europe. For this, the free circulation of researchers (also staff mobility between industry and academia) needs to be assured and specific targets with respective timetables need to be set for the development of the ERA.

All in all, this position paper from the council of scientists running the ERC gives a good overview on their viewpoints on research in Europe, and on the role of frontier research in this context. It is however somewhat disappointing that the ScC only proposes very few new ideas and solely builds on the yet very limited experience of the ERC.

The opinion of the ERC's Scientific Council can be found under:

http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/scc_reflections_era_greenpaper_310807_erc_format_fck2_en.pdf

European Group on Ethics: opinion on the use of human embryonic stem cells in research

On 20 June 2007, the European Group on Ethics (EGE) published an opinion on the ethics review of research projects using human embryonic stem cells in FP7. The EGE is an advisory body appointed by the President of the European Commission (EC) to whom it delivers opinions on sensitive ethical issues.

The delicate issue of human embryonic stem cells had already been discussed in July 2006 during the political negotiations on the FP7 proposal, where a number of Member States were threatening to block the decision on FP7 in the Council of the European Union if the rules regarding human embryonic stem cells were not made stricter.

According to the now adopted proposal, three types of research are basically forbidden under FP7:

1. research activities aiming at human cloning for reproductive purposes;
2. research activities intended to modify the genetic heritage of human beings which could make such changes heritable;
3. research activities intended to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Moreover, the agreement finally reached between the Member States foresees the following:

- No research activity involving human embryonic stem cells can be funded in a country where such research is forbidden. The researchers must also seek national approval for their projects and ensure they respect all national rules and procedures.
- In its calls for proposals, the EC never solicits projects to use human embryonic stem cells. This decision is left to the scientists only, according to their research objectives.
- Each project involving the use of human embryonic stem cells must pass both a scientific evaluation and an ethical review by a Regulatory Committee, which has the power to refuse its funding. Ethical reviews might also be carried out during the lifetime of the project.

In its recent opinion, the EGE refined these general rules by stating that the following considerations have to apply to projects funded by the EU which include the use of human embryonic stem cells:

- the used human embryonic stem cells lines have to result from non-implanted In Vitro Fertilisation embryos;
- where possible, human embryonic stem cells lines banked in the European Registry (see Synopsis 2007/2) should be used;
- if alternatives to human embryonic stem cells with the same potential as embryo-derived stem cells will be found in the future, their use should be maximised;
- donor's rights have to be protected and safeguarded;
- actions to stimulate the public debate on this research area are needed at the EU level.

In fact, according to a new survey published by the EC only 11% of the citizens are interested in ethical issues.

The EGE's opinion on the use of human embryonic stem cells in research can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/european_group_ethics/activities/docs/opinion_22_final_follow_up_en.pdf

General information on the EGE can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/european_group_ethics/index_en.htm

ERAWATCH provides information about the status of the European Research Area

ERAWATCH is a common project of DG Research and the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) in Seville. The IPTS is one of the seven scientific institutes of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and carries out research on the connections between technology, economy and society. The objective of ERAWATCH is to provide information on research policy in Europe, both on national and regional level. In the future ERAWATCH will be completed by information on the development of EU research policy.

Text information and data concerning 37 countries can be found on the ERAWATCH website, including Switzerland and other countries with a high relevance for the European Research Area, like USA, China and Japan. The ERAWATCH website is divided into two parts:

- Under research inventory data on scientific effectiveness, but also information on national research policy, research institutions, programmes or policy papers can be found. Data mining is possible either by country or by topic (the latter in order to make comparisons between different countries). Indicators include number of patents, R&D spending, or human resources in S&T.
- The section *intelligence service* offers analyses about research systems in some European countries and regions. Those are mainly based on information from the research inventory. The

objective of the authors of the site is that the intelligence service will get steadily updated and expanded.

The European Commission finances ERWATCH through FP7. It mandates national experts to collect the information, according to guidelines. The project is still under construction, but the European Commission would like ERAWATCH to become a reference source for any information related to the development of the European Research Area, so that benchmarking, monitoring and coordination of ERA gets substantially facilitated.

The ERAWATCH site can be found here:
<http://cordis.europa.eu/erawatch/index.cfm>

Publications

A New Deal for European Research Policy

This summer, the “Political and Forward Analysis” Unit of the European Commission’s DG Research has published a book entitled “A New Deal for an Effective European Research Policy – the Design and Impacts of the 7th Framework Programme”. This book builds on the impact analysis performed during the drafting of FP7 and details all the economic and statistical data that formed the basis for the design of FP7, thereby representing a valuable source of information not only for a deep understanding of FP7, but also in the context of the ongoing discussion on the reform of the European Research Area. The many graphics of the book might also be of help for presentations on the European Research Framework Programmes.

The book can be ordered at Springer Publisher (www.springer.com), ISBN 978-1-4020-5550-8.

Report on the European biotech sector

In the wake of the review of the EU Strategy on Life Sciences and Biotechnology in April (see Synopsis 2007/3), the final report of the FP6 project Biopolis on the inventory and analysis of national biotechnology policies has recently been published. This report makes some interesting recommendations to national policy makers in the field of biotechnology and completes its overview with a performance cluster analysis of the different European countries, including candidate countries and non-EU members. In this ranking, Switzerland belongs to the best-performing group, together with Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

The report is available under:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/biosociety/pdf/biopolis-finalreport_en.pdf

ERA-NET Series V

The European Commission has recently published the fifth of its series of ERA-NET project descriptions. As its predecessors, this leaflet is in the form of a binder with individual sheets for each project. Some of these synopses are updates from ERA-NETs found in earlier series. All together, these leaflets allow a quick albeit complete overview on the running ERA-NETs.

The ERA-NET Series V project description sheets can be obtained in electronic format under:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp6/pdf/era-net_serie5_en.pdf

New funding for Galileo and EIT from the Community budget

On 19 September, the European Commission (EC) adopted a proposal for a new funding mechanism through a revision of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2007-2013, which would provide the extra €2.4 billion required for the European satellite navigation system Galileo. According to calculations of the DG Transport, the last development phase and the entire deployment phase of Galileo until 2013 would cost €3.4 billion. As the financial perspectives only earmark €1 billion for Galileo, €2.4 billion still need to be found. The EC is proposing that the money be stumped up from existing margins available under EU budget Heading 2 (Agriculture), namely €2.189 billion for 2007 and 2008, and Heading 5 (Administration), namely €220 million. The remainder would be found by transferring €300 million in research funding for Galileo from the transport thematic of FP7. As the total amount to be collected from the public monies exceeds the €2.4 billion needed for Galileo, €309 million would be allocated to financing the European Institute of Technology (EIT).

As reported in May (see SwissCore Synopsis 2007/4), the EC is renouncing for the moment to establish a public-private partnership, but hopes that the private sector will be joining in again when the system is up and running. With this new funding, the EC is giving a strong signal for the strategic importance attributed to the programme Galileo, which is full of promising applications and seen as vital for the independence of Europe.

To be adopted, the communication will first have to be discussed between the two arms of the Budgetary Authority (Council of the European Union and European Parliament) and the Commission, in so-called trilogue meetings. Then, the proposal will be examined and voted by the Council and Parliament. Since the total budget is not exceeding 0.03% of the EU's GNP, the decision can be taken by the Council through a qualified majority vote (instead of unanimity). A decision on the EC's proposal is expected for December. In the meantime, the first call for Galileo under the Transport theme within FP7 is planned to be published in November. The following calls are still in discussion as the Work Programme 2008, with a budget of €40 million for the Galileo call in 2008, should only be adopted at the end of October. The calls are also open to Swiss scientists, as they are part of FP7.

The communication of the EC can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/energy_transport/galileo/documents/doc/communication_190907_en.pdf

Innovation on regional level could be fostered by use of Structural Funds and FP7

In a press conference on 10 September, the Commissioner for regional policy, Ms Hübner, and the Commissioner for research, Mr Potocnik, stressed the disparity in R&D spending in European regions. Whereas some regions have an R&D intensity of 8% (investment in R&D as a percentage of GDP), others have less than 1% or even zero.

As many times before, the two Commissioners suggested to make use of the Structural Funds such as the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the European Agricultural Fund to foster research and innovation in regions with little dynamic in R&D. They referred to a recently published Communication of the European Commission, which proposed some actions to boost regional R&D and innovation. This policy paper, adopted in mid-August, specifies different measures on a regional level which could be supported by Structural funds: developing research infrastructures, facilitating access to risk capital, or supporting technology transfer activities between universities and SMEs. According to the Communication, the coordination of the Structural Funds with grants allocated through FP7 or the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) is also important.

While in FP7 funds are awarded based on the criteria of excellence, the Structural Funds should be used to foster low R&D intensive areas, in order to allow them to catch up and to get funded by the Research Framework Programme at a later stage.

Member States are urged to use 60 to 75% of the resources they get from Structural Funds to investments which are related to the Lisbon Strategy. For the period 2007-2013, Member States have earmarked around €45 billion from the funds for investment in research and innovation, the Commission says; this is three times more than in the budget cycle 2000-2006. As there will be more money available for research and innovation through the Structural Funds, there will be less pressure on FP7 to fund projects others than those who meet the criteria of excellence.

In addition, CREST, the EU Council's Scientific and Technical Research Committee, has published a set of 14 recommendations to help Member States and regions to better exploit the synergies between FP7 and Structural Funds. Those guidelines have already been presented in the meeting of the Council in June 2007. By the end of 2007, the Commission plans to publish a practical guide about funding opportunities for research institutions and companies wishing to use EU funding to undertake research and innovation activities. A report on the progress made in the coordinated use of the different European Community instruments is planned for spring 2009.

The Commission's Communication on the use of Structural Funds can be found here:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0474en01.pdf

For the CREST guidelines please go to:

<http://cordis.europa.eu/documents/documentlibrary/2851EN.pdf>

The European Security Research and Innovation Forum (ESRIF)

The European Security Research and Innovation Forum (ESRIF) is a new and informal forum created by the European Commission. Its goal is to bring together stakeholders from the public and private sector to foster dialogue on European security needs in a long term perspective.

The creation of ESRIF was one of the actions proposed by the European Security Research Advisory Board (ESRAB) in its report of 22 September 2006. ESRAB included high level strategists who have a responsibility for security research, both from public and private sector.

ESRIF will have a plenary of about 50 to 70 members, representing industry, research institutions, public and private end-users of security technologies, civil society organisations as well as the EU institutions, including the Parliament. Additionally, working groups will be created and will involve around 200 to 300 contributors. ESRIF was launched with a first meeting on 11 September, the anniversary of the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001. In a press conference, Enterprise and Industry Commissioner Verheugen referred to two main goals of ESRIF. First, it is supposed to help those who develop new security technologies to better understand the needs and priorities of Member State authorities in their fight against terrorism. Second, the forum should also offer the opportunity to discuss ethical questions related to these new security technologies, in particular possible problems concerning privacy.

In the first call for proposals for security research in FP7, the European Commission foresees to fund 44 projects with €156 million. In FP7 a total of about €1.5 billion is earmarked for security research over the period 2007-2013. But ESRIF is supposed to go beyond FP7 security research, as it aims at long term security research and technology needs.

ESRIF will be established for a limited period of time, until the end of 2009. It is planned that ESRIF will present a strategic security research and innovation agenda towards the end of 2009.

For more information on the European Commission's security research programme go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/security/index_en.htm

The European Commission wants to boost e-skills

On 7 September 2007, the European Commission (EC) adopted a policy communication on e-skills. An “e-Skills Industry Leadership Board” appointed by the EC collected data that indicate that more than one third of Europeans have no basic e-skills and that only 20% of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) users are women. Moreover, according to a recent EC report made in collaboration with professionals from the sector of e-skills (such as Microsoft, Hewlett Packard or Siemens), Europe is likely to face a growing lack of e-skills in the coming years. Indeed, these abilities are important to boost innovation, productivity, employability and the competitiveness of European enterprises.

As a result of these findings, the EC proposes a long-term e-skills agenda whose implementation is mainly within the responsibility of Member States, industry and academia. It also puts forward a set of five areas of action to complement the efforts made at the national level:

- Raising awareness: reinforcing the links between ICT, learning and innovation by encouraging awareness campaigns particularly for parents, teachers and pupils, as well as by exchanging information and good practice for the promotion of mathematics, sciences, ICT and e-skills.
- Promoting long-term cooperation and monitoring progress: strengthening cooperation between public authorities and the private sector, academia, unions and associations through the promotion of multi-stakeholder partnerships as well as promoting ICT education on a long-term basis.
- Developing supporting actions and tools: supporting the development of a European e-competence framework, the Europass initiative or a European handbook.
- Fostering employability and social inclusion: encouraging corporate social responsibility as well as partnerships between providers of e-skills, business skills training and job placement support services through an initiative on e-inclusion in 2008.
- Promoting better and greater use of e-learning: releasing a report in 2008 with recommendations for targeted e-learning initiatives and the promotion of successful strategies in order to support the networking of training centres.

To maintain a good follow-up of these actions, the European Commission is planning to organise a conference at the end of 2008 with the various stakeholders to report on progress and present the results of these actions.

The EC’s communication on e-skills can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/ict/policy/doc/COMM_PDF_COM_2007_0496_F_EN_ACTE.pdf

Europe wants to promote young people

On 5 September, the European Commission adopted a communication entitled “Promoting young people’s full participation in education, employment and society”. It proposes a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy, covering a broad range of issues from education through employment, and social inclusion through health and active citizenship. The document aims at reinforcing the partnership between EU institutions and youth representatives and tries to convince Members States to invest in young people to promote education, employment, social inclusion, health and active citizenship through a lifecycle approach. The communication puts forward a set of concrete actions:

- the publication of an EU report on youth every three years;
- the launch of a consultation and an impact assessment on voluntary activities of young people;
- a pilot initiative “Your first job abroad” (to promote mobility);
- a European quality charter on internships;
- a study pertaining to young people’s access to culture;

- an upcoming new health strategy, which should support tailored actions for young people.
- The Communication is accompanied by two analytical documents – on youth volunteering and on youth unemployment. These documents should serve as a basis for future development of youth policy coordination in the EU.

The full text of the Communication and both annexes can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/doc/communication050907_en.pdf

Report on challenges for doctoral education in Europe

On 4 September, the European University Association (EUA) published a report on the state of doctoral education in Europe. The publication highlights the introduction of new organisational structures to manage doctoral education, such as doctoral or graduate schools, and the emergence of innovative programmes, including professional doctorates, in response to the demands of the labour market. Moreover, the report raises challenges to be faced to create favourable conditions to attract and retain the best talents:

- The funding of doctoral education should be more attractive for candidates from lower income groups and more flexible for the ones following part-time degrees.
- National governments should analyse the diversity in both the structure of doctoral education but also in the way programmes and structures are funded, in order to increase funding in an appropriate manner.
- Professional skills development of doctoral candidates should be part of the training in order to allow better career perspectives.
- Mobility could be increased through a better coordination of funding.

The EUA is therefore calling for increased coordination and consultation between higher education institutions and all funding bodies, on national and international level.

The report “Doctoral Programmes in Europe’s Universities: Achievements and Challenges” can be downloaded under:

http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/Doctoral_Programmes_in_Europe_s_Universities.pdf

Quality of teacher education in the EU to be improved

At the beginning of August, the European Commission (EC) tabled a communication to improve the quality of teacher training in the European Union. The EC wants to raise the awareness of the Member States in order to give teachers the right skills to teach their pupils, to face the challenges of an increasingly knowledge-based society. The analysis by the EC shows that the current systems for teacher training and education are often failing to give teachers the training they need. If adopted, the proposal of the EC should help Member States setting up common guidelines and principles for action to increase the teacher education on a national level, like:

- ensuring that provision for teachers’ education and professional development is coordinated, coherent and adequately resourced;
- ensuring that all teachers have access to the knowledge, attitudes and pedagogic skills that they require in order to be effective;
- promoting a culture of reflective practice and research among teachers;
- promoting the status and recognition of the teaching profession;
- supporting the professionalisation of teaching.

The EC will seek to take forward this proposal within the Education and Training 2010 programme. It will be assisted in this task by the forthcoming conferences organised in the framework of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council.

The full text of the Communication “Improving the quality of teacher education” can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/com392_en.pdf

New reports reveal limited student mobility in Europe

On 12 September, Eurydice, the European education information network, published its new report entitled “Key data on higher education in Europe”, which focuses in particular on the social dimension of higher education and student mobility. The report analyses the situation for the year 2004-2006 in 32 European countries (EU 27 + Turkey, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein) and consists of 70 indicators. It identifies recent trends in participation, mobility and graduates in higher education. It reveals for example that the percentage of higher education students abroad was only 2% in 2004. The report also compares the financial costs of higher education students.

Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Union, which gathered the data for the Eurydice analysis, published a report on research mobility, “How mobile are highly qualified Human Resources in Science and Technology (HRST)?”. The study finds that some 6% of the EU’s HRST come from another country and shows big disparities in the share of these non-nationals among Member States. For 2006, Switzerland has the second highest proportion of non-national HRST (18.4%), after Luxembourg with 46%.

The full report of Eurydice can be downloaded under:

http://www.eurydice.org/ressources/eurydice/pdf/0_integral/088EN.pdf

The full report of Eurostat can be downloaded under:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-007-075/EN/KS-SF-007-075-EN.PDF

Bruegel’s proposal for a reform of the European universities

Based on a survey of European universities, a policy brief published by the Brussels-based think tank Bruegel states that despite the good performance of some countries, Europe as a whole trails behind the US by a wide margin. The authors conclude that this is due to two fundamental problems: Europe invests too little in higher education and European universities suffer from poor governance, insufficient autonomy and often perverse incentives. The findings are based on two pieces of Bruegel’s research: a “country performance index”, based on the Shanghai Ranking of top universities, and the results of a survey sent to all European universities in the Top 500 Ranking.

The policy brief can be downloaded from Bruegel’s website:

http://www.bruegel.org/Public/Publication_detail.php?ID=1169&publicationID=4618

SwissCore Küche

Introduction to EU policy and programmes in research, education and innovation

For the third consecutive year, Euresearch and SwissCore jointly organised an information event on the EU policy and programmes. This year, besides the research programmes, the focus was also made on innovation and education. A brief insight was given into the different European programmes, the European Research Area as well as the corresponding Swiss side of the programmes. The event took place on 28 September in Berne with an audience composed of people from the federal administration and other public organisations.