

SwissCore Synopsis

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♦ Seen from Brussels

A new Treaty for the EU: consequences for research policy?

This October, the results of the consultation on the European Research Area (ERA), presented at a high-level meeting in Lisbon, were somewhat overshadowed by the discussions surrounding the Reform Treaty of the European Union. This attempt to salvage the defunct Constitution, agreed upon in Lisbon on 18 October and therefore known as the Treaty of Lisbon, has also some implications for the research policy of the EU. Indeed, the ERA is now explicitly stated in the proposed text, giving the European Commission a legal basis to propose the necessary initiatives to realise it (p.3).

In the new Treaty, as was already the case for previous modifications, the decision powers of the European Parliament have been expanded, many articles falling newly under the co-decision procedure between Council and Parliament. However, the Treaty articles pertaining to research will remain under the current decision procedures (e.g. co-decision for the Framework Programme and the Rules for Participation, consultation for the Specific Programmes and the initiatives under Art.171). Therefore, the usual procedures will not change if the 7th Framework Programme needs to be amended as a consequence of the 2010 mid-term review. Two other new important points that touch the fields covered by SwissCore are the inclusion of space policy in the research chapter of the Treaty and the addition of sport in the education and youth part.

Despite all this, in the opinion of the legal services of the EU Council, it is not the modifications themselves that will matter the most, but rather how they will be interpreted by the institutions of the EU. It therefore remains to be seen how much competence will be granted to the Commission by the other institutions for making the ERA a reality. The Treaty of Lisbon is scheduled to be signed on 13 December and will need to be ratified by the Member States of the EU.

The draft text of the Treaty of Lisbon can be found under:

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=1317&lang=en&mode=g

♦ Research

7th Framework Programme (FP7)

New JTI proposal on Fuel Cells and Hydrogen

On 10 October 2007, the European Commission tabled the fifth proposal for a Joint Technology Initiative (JTI). The proposed JTI on Fuel Cells and Hydrogen (FCH) foresees the establishment of a Joint Undertaking (JU; public-private partnership) based on Art.171 of the EU Treaty and has the goal to ensure a rapid development and usage of fuel cells and hydrogen technologies. Founding members of the Joint Undertaking will be the European Commission and the “European Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Joint Technology Initiative Industry Grouping AISBL”, in short “Industry Grouping”. In addition, the future membership of a “Research Grouping” is foreseen, composed of non-for-profit research organisations, universities and research centres.

The executive bodies of the future JTI would be a Governing Board and a Programme Office, seconded by a High Level Member States Group and a Scientific Committee with advisory roles. A General Assembly of all stakeholders (i.e. including the research project participants) would be convened once a year, in order to gather inputs on the realised scientific progresses. The European Commission and the Industry Grouping would be equally represented in the Governing Board; the foreseen Research Grouping would get 1/6 of the votes of the Commission in case of membership. The administrative costs of the JU would then be shared according to the same distribution principle (i.e. the Research Grouping would have to take over 1/6 of the Commission’s share of the administrative costs).

The Industry Grouping would commit €470 million to the JTI, and the European Commission has foreseen to finance the FCH JTI with another €470 million, of which a maximum of €20 million

(4%) can be used for administrative expenses. The Commission's contribution would be taken out of the budget of four different Themes of FP7, according to the following distribution:

- Energy: €301.6 mio.
- Transport: € 81.4 mio.
- NMP: € 47.9 mio.
- Environment: € 19.1 mio.

The main part of these research funds will be awarded to project consortia through calls for proposals followed by independent evaluations. All public and private undertakings located in EU Member States or countries associated to FP7 (e.g. Switzerland) would be able to participate. A minimum of three independent partners from three different Member States or Associated Countries is required. In addition, at least one participant has to be a member of the Industry or Research Grouping; this partner would usually be the coordinator of the consortium. The rest of the conditions are quite similar to the FP7 Rules for Participation, especially concerning the Intellectual Property Rights. Unfortunately, in the proposal, there is no information on the rate of financing of the research projects.

As for the previous JTI proposals, and according to Art.171, the current proposal has to be adopted by the Council of the European Union, after consultation of the European Parliament. The FCH JTI proposal is planned to be presented by the European Commission at the Competitiveness Council meeting of 22-23 November; a debate in Council and Parliament will most likely take place during the Slovenian Presidency of the EU in Spring 2008.

The European Commission's proposal for a Fuel Cells and Hydrogen JTI can be found under: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0571en01.pdf

FP7 Advisory Groups

The European Commission has recently published the updated lists of the members of the different Advisory Groups for the Themes and Sub-Programmes of FP7. These Advisory Groups oversee the scientific developments in their field and are consulted during the drafting of the Work Programmes. Their mission is to advise the Commission on the overall strategy to be followed for each Theme of the Research Framework Programme and how to best respond to possible new developments.

The list of the members of the FP7 Advisory Groups can be found under: http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/index_en.cfm?pg=eag

EU Research Policy

A new legal basis for the European Research Area

On 8-10 October, a high-level conference was held by the European Commission in Lisbon to discuss the future of the European Research Area (ERA). Besides speeches from ministers and eminent scientists from all over Europe, preliminary results of the public consultation on the ERA (based on the ERA Green Paper) were presented by the Commission; these findings are also summarized in a draft document published in September (see link below).

The most pressing issues that emerged from both the consultation and the conference were the sharing of knowledge and the single labour market for researchers. Despite urging the Commission to take steps in these fields, most of the stakeholders are not in favour of binding legislative actions at European level. They rather advocate flexible, voluntary and bottom-up cooperation schemes, with the Commission acting as a facilitator rather than a regulator.

Notwithstanding the views of the stakeholders, the Commission foresees to table a series of initiatives in 2008, mostly taking the form of Directives, Regulations, new Programmes or Recommendations. The recently signed Treaty of Lisbon (Reform Treaty) gives the Commission a more active role in the realisation of the ERA: it specifically mentions the concept of the ERA

and gives the Commission a direct legal base for proposing legislative actions to realise it. Moreover, in the new Treaty, the free circulation of researchers, scientific knowledge and technology is explicitly stated as an objective of the European Union, thereby addressing the two main issues of the stakeholders in the ERA consultation.

One of the first measures taken by the Commission in response to the ERA consultation process was the replacement of EURAB, the European Research Advisory Body, by a newly created European Research Area Board (ERAB). This new board will have the task to deliver an annual report on the state of the ERA. ERAB will also provide opinions on facets of the ERA, collect the opinions of national R&D consultative bodies, and organise workshops as well as a bi-annual ERA stakeholder assembly. A panel has been charged with the identification of 22 experts from academia, industry, politics and other fields and will submit its suggestions to the Commission by January 2008. The three members of the panel are:

- Claudie Haigneré, French astronaut and former Minister for both Research and Europe;
- Vaira Vike-Freiberga, professor of psychology and former President of Latvia;
- Andrew Dearing, Secretary General of the European Industrial Research Management Association.

As for the Scientific Council of the ERC (European Research Council), the Commission has understood that it is worth putting scientists and experts in the driving seat rather than just relying on their advice for directions. With a new constellation of members and the enhanced mission of also gathering the stakeholders' opinions, the ERAB could go beyond what EURAB has achieved, and it will be in the hands of its 22 members to concretely help realising the ERA.

The preliminary results of the Commission's public consultation on the ERA can be found under: http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/preliminaryresults-eraconsultation_en.pdf

First review of the Action Plan on Nanosciences and Nanotechnology

On 6 September, the European Commission (EC) published the first implementation report of the Nanosciences and Nanotechnologies Action Plan 2005-2009. This report stresses the ever growing importance of this scientific field and lists some of the achievements of the first two years of the Action Plan:

- Research funding: A total of €1.4 billion allocated to 550 R&D projects in nanosciences and nanotechnology were spent during the five years of FP6. This represents one third of the total public spending in Europe and makes the EC the world's largest funding agency in this domain. This allocated funding represents a massive increase compared to the one of FP5 (€220 million) and will be further increased under FP7, with a foreseen budget of €3.5 billion over seven years.
- Participation of the public sector: Private R&D investments in nanosciences and nanotechnology represent only 55% of the total spending and Europe is lagging behind the US and Japan. However, industrial participation increased under FP6 and the creation of several European technology Platforms has strengthened public-private cooperation in this field.
- International cooperation: Selected strategic activities have been undertaken to strengthen international cooperation and participation of international partners in R&D projects has increased.
- Public awareness and safety issues: Several activities have been carried out to engage the public, which have been complemented by wide ranging efforts to ensure safe development and use of nanotechnologies.

On this last subject, the report identifies the key actions to be taken in the coming years. Indeed, there is still a large gap of knowledge concerning the safety of nanotechnologies and their impact on human health and the environment. The European Commission is currently reviewing the legislation in force and may propose regulatory actions based on identified needs. Moreover, to promote safe and responsible nanotechnology research, a "Code of Conduct for Responsible Nanosciences and Nanotechnology Research" is currently being drafted, based on a public consultation performed this summer. This Code of Conduct will then be submitted to Member States for adoption on a voluntary basis.

The next implementation report on the Nanosciences and Nanotechnology Action Plan is planned to be published by the end of 2009.

The European Commission's first implementation report can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/nanotechnology/pdf/comm_2007_0505_en.pdf

Delay in the implementation of “the researchers’ visa”

The implementation of the 2005 Directive on researchers’ visa (2005/71/EC) has been criticized by the European Commissioner for Research, Janez Potocnik. The deadline for the transposition of the Directive into national law was set on 12 October. The Commissioner stated that the Member States have to honour their commitment to create a facilitated system for scientists from outside the EU who want to carry out their research in Europe. At this point, all Member States should have put in place the necessary laws to implement the Directive.

Supporting the mobility of researchers is one of the Lisbon objectives and a prerequisite for the process of building a European Research Area (ERA). The Directive is intended to ease the entry of Third Countries nationals into the EU in order to conduct scientific research: the researchers’ visa would apply to any Third Country researcher who can present a contract signed with an approved research body for carrying out research work in the EU. The main points of the Directive are:

- Issuance of permits to stay for a minimum of one year, with the possibility of renewal;
- Approval granted to a research organisation to hire the Third Country national for a minimum period of five years;
- Equal treatment with nationals of the country in which research is to be carried out (recognition of diplomas, working conditions, branches of social security or tax benefits);
- Holders of such visas will automatically have the right to work in all the other Member States for up to three months. The researcher might however need a new hosting agreement if she/he is to stay in another Member State for more than three months.

At the present time, six Member States (Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Austria, Portugal and Romania) have fully transposed the Directive into national law; other countries like France, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia have only partially done so. The Commission is planning to undertake procedures against Member States that have not yet implemented the Directive.

Further information about the 2005/71/EC Directive can be found under:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l_289/l_28920051103en00150022.pdf

Publications

White Paper on Health Strategy 2008-2013

On 23 October, the European Commission published a White Paper on the new public health strategy for the years 2008-2013. Titled “Together for Health: A Strategic Approach for the EU 2008-2013”, this paper details the Commission’s plans to ensure “cooperative action at Community level” in the field of public health. Indeed, the EU has only limited responsibilities in this field, based on Art.152 of the EU Treaty. Therefore, the proposed actions are mainly limited to include the public health aspects in all other EU policies and to define a common set of principles. The ageing population, the threats to health (through pandemics, catastrophes or acts of terrorism) and the emergence of new health technologies are identified in the White Paper as the factors that have prompted the Commission to re-examine its public health strategy.

The European Commission’s Health Strategy can be found under:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0630en01.pdf

ICT Results: a web platform for researchers and investors

The former “IST Results” site has been adapted to FP7 and will be continued under the name “ICT Results”. On this web page, new developments in the ICT field can be found, as well as a list of technologies ready to be marketed. A list of project consortia actively seeking further partnerships can also be found on this site. There is a section devoted to investors, with a list of business investors and venture capitalists, as well as information specifically targeted to potential investors. This site can therefore be useful not only for R&D project participants, but also for people in the business sector looking for an opportunity to develop and market new ICT tools and products. This site also allows staying abreast of the newest developments in the ICT field.

The “ICT Results” page can be found under:

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

Renewed Research Infrastructures web portal

The European Commission has overhauled its website on Research Infrastructures, gathering diverse information on this topic and explaining in a simple way the sometimes difficult concepts in the area of European Research Infrastructure Policy. A link to the most recent policy documents of the EU is provided, as well as a list of the sources of financial support for research infrastructures. It will be a good source of information for people dealing with this topic.

The European Commission’s new website for research infrastructures can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/infrastructures/index_en.html

Innovation

Communication on SME policy to prepare a Small Business Act?

In a Communication “Small and medium-sized enterprises – Key for delivering more growth and jobs. A mid-term review of Modern SME Policy”, the European Commission examines its SME policy of the last two years. Published on 4 October, the Communication outlines five main areas of European SME policy where some achievements have been made since 2005:

- Cutting red tape (reducing bureaucracy)
- Improving SMEs access to markets
- Promoting entrepreneurship and skills
- Improving SMEs growth potential and strengthening dialogue with stakeholders
- Strengthening dialogue and consultation with SME stakeholders

According to the Commission, SMEs have been creating new jobs particularly in sectors like construction, transport, communication or tourism. Favourably, the costs for founding a company have decreased since 2002 and the time span for the administrative procedures to register a company could be cut from 24 to 12 days. The Commission also declares a rising awareness of entrepreneurship and SMEs in Europe, and welcomes efforts made in some Member States to introduce entrepreneurship education in school curricula. On its part, the Commission supported the Member States by collecting and publishing more than 250 good practices.

However, more action is planned in the future. For the period 2007 to 2013, a considerable share of the Structural Funds will be spent for SME related projects, for instance to improve their innovation capacity, to increase their investment in RTD and in skills. Another initiative to boost SMEs, with an overall budget of more than €1 billion, is the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP), which started at the beginning of 2007.

The Communication on SMEs aims to gather the views of small companies and their representatives in order to prepare a Small Business Act (SBA). The idea of a SBA which probably would contain a wide range of measures to support SMEs has already been briefly mentioned at the October meeting of the EU Heads of State and Governments. However, the possible content of such an act is not yet known and the Commission plans to present a draft by the end of 2008.

The Communication can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/docs/com_2007_0592_en.pdf

New Communication on the status of the Intelligent Car Initiative

Mobility has become an integral part of modern society. In view of dealing with the negative effects of increasing mobility, the European Commission presented in a second Communication the status of the “Intelligent Car Initiative” on 17 September. It is one of three i2010 flagship initiatives that aim to show in which way Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can overcome problems and improve quality of life. The two other initiatives are “Technologies for an ageing society” and “Digital libraries”.

The present Communication reports on achievements, but enumerates also further steps that need to be done. In respect thereof, three main goals of the initiative can be specified:

- To coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders to accelerate the development and take-up of information and communication technologies, with the objective to improve security and reduce environmental impact of mobility
- To boost further R&D on smarter, cleaner and safer cars, with funding from FP7, including e.g. tests of e-safety systems on driver behaviour.
- To build awareness of the advantages of e-safety technologies through technology demonstrations and special TV programmes.

Two technologies, eCall (the pan-European in-vehicle emergency call) and ESC (Electronic Stability Control), have already reached a level which could allow an introduction within three to five years.

Further information on the Intelligent Car Initiative can be found directly in the Communication:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/esafety/doc/i2010_intelligent_car/en_com_intelligent_car.pdf

More general information about e-safety can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/esafety/index_en.htm

Publications

The 2007 EU Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard

According the 2007 EU Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard, presented on 5 October by the European Commission, an upward trend in R&D investment of the private sector can be seen. The report says that in 2006 R&D spending in EU member countries has increased by 7.4%, compared to 5.3% in 2005. Nevertheless growth was stronger in non-EU countries, reaching 10%. Data and tables for both, EU and non-EU companies (including Swiss companies) are presented in the report.

The report as well as different ranking lists can be found here:

http://iri.jrc.ec.europa.eu/research/scoreboard_2007.htm

The Intelligent Energy News Review

In September, the second issue of the Intelligent Energy News Review has been published. Information is given for instance about the new responsibilities of the former Intelligent Energy Executive Agency (IEEA), which has become the Executive Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation (EACI). Other articles are about energy use in transport, which is the principal topic of the issue.

Issue one and two of the Intelligent Energy News Review can be downloaded here:

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/library/publications_en.htm

smE-MPOWER to assist and guide SMEs applying for FP7 funds

The project smE-MPOWER is funded by the European Commission within the Research and Innovation actions of FP6. Its goal is to assist SMEs with their R&D proposals and to guide them through all stages of the application process of the Research Framework Programme. The initiative focuses on the manufacturing sector and wants to improve the number of SME-driven proposals in FP7. Switzerland is part of smE-MPOWER and represented by the Centre CIM de Suisse Occidentale, CCSO (CIM means Computer Integrated Manufacturing).

More information can be found here:

<http://www.sme-mpower.net/>

For information about the Swiss Partner CCSO go to:

<http://www.ccsso.ch/>

◆ Education

The European Commission's report on progress in the education field

At the beginning of October, the European Commission (EC) published a report on progress towards the Lisbon objectives in the education field. The document provides an update on Member States' performance in meeting the five targets (benchmarks) to be met by 2010, which had been agreed by ministers in May 2003. For three of these targets, the Member States are lagging behind:

- By 2010, the share of the EU population aged 18-24 who are early school leavers should be 10% or under. The figure for 2006 is still 15.3% and needs to drop. For comparison, the percentage for the year 2000 was 17.3%.
- Linked to the first target, 85% of young people aged 20-24 should complete upper secondary education. The figure for 2006 is 79%, up only slightly from the 77.3% level recorded in the year 2000.
- Another benchmark states that, by 2010, 12.5% of the EU adult population should participate in adult learning. For 2006, it was only 9.9%.

The benchmark where Member States are performing well is the increase of mathematics, science and technology graduates. The target set a 15% increase by 2010, compared to the 2000 level, which was already achieved in 2005.

Progress on the last benchmark, targeting a reduction of 20% of young people having reading difficulties, is still unclear. The report states that up-to-date statistics on this subject will only become available in December.

As a comment on these figures, Jan Figel, European Commissioner for Education, Training and Culture underlined that "Member States need to redouble their efforts to make the EU's education and training meet the challenges of the 21st century."

The full report "Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in Education and Training" can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/progress06/report_en.pdf

A new Action Plan on adult learning

On 27 September, the European Commission adopted a Communication calling on the Member States to work together and support the EU's Action Plan on adult learning. The Action Plan aims at removing the barriers that prevent adults from engaging in learning activities, and at improving the quality and efficiency of the adult learning sector. For this, Member States should ensure adequate levels of investment and better monitoring of the adult learning sector.

The following actions are proposed to the Member States to increase their involvement:

1. Analyse the effects on adult learning of reforms in other educational sectors.

2. Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector. Quality assurance forms an important part of the reforms in education and training. The Commission urges Member States to pay greater attention to the quality of the staff involved in delivering learning activities.
3. Increase the possibilities to achieve at least one higher-level qualification.
4. Speed up the process of assessing and recognizing non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups.
5. Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

As follow up, a working group should be established by the end of 2007 to support the Commission and Member States to detail actions and projects under this Action Plan and take care of further implementation. A conference will be organised in the second half of 2009 to report on results achieved and to discuss the way forward.

The Communication can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/adult/com558_en.pdf

For more information on adult learning, please refer to:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/adult/index_en.html

€7.6 million for transatlantic university cooperation

On 18 September, the European Commission launched jointly with US authorities 14 new university cooperation projects within the current EU-US Education Agreement. The projects, funded by matching funds from both partners under the ATLANTIS programme (Actions for Transatlantic Links and Academic Networks for Training and Integrated Studies), are intended to foster transatlantic academic cooperation through innovative student exchange, resulting in double university degrees, joint curriculum development and policy studies. More specifically, the projects are:

- 8 “Transatlantic Degrees”, joint or double Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees;
- 2 “Excellence in Mobility” projects, similar to the Erasmus university exchange programme;
- 4 “Policy Oriented Actions”, to enhance transatlantic collaboration.

The selected projects cover 32 European institutions from 12 Members States and 22 American institutions; they will support about 380 students. Switzerland is not participating in these projects.

For further information about the ATLANTIS programme, please refer to:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/eu-usa/call_en.html

Consultation exercise on modernising schools

Mid-July, the European Commission launched a public consultation entitled “Schools for the 21st Century”. Based on eight key questions, the consultation sought views about the development and modernisation of school education in the Member States. The Commission's consultation document raises a series of issues that are deemed to be crucial for schools in Europe (such as schools and key competences, schools and social inclusion as well as the role of teachers, among others). The consultation closed on 15 October 2007. The findings of this Europe-wide exercise will serve as basis for a formal policy statement, in the form of a Communication by the European Commission.

The consultation document is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/school21/index_en.html

Publications

Lifelong Learning Programme – Call for proposals 2008

On 2 October, the European Commission published the call for proposals 2008 for the Lifelong Learning Programme. The main deadlines are set between 30 November 2007 and 31 March

2008. As Switzerland is not associated to the programme yet, the call is not open for Swiss participants.

For further information about the Call, please refer to:
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/llp/funding_en.htm

SwissCore Küche

Swiss Science Briefing 2007 focuses on the Knowledge Triangle

On 9 October, the Swiss Science Briefing presented the Swiss Finance Institute, a private foundation created in 2005 by the Swiss banking sector and leading Swiss universities in this field. The Swiss Finance Institute aims at advancing research activities in finance as well as supporting PhD and executive education in the banking and finance industry. The Swiss Finance Institute thus not only presents a novel approach in the area of finance, but it also combines the aspects of research, education and innovation. Structured to integrate the three pillars of the knowledge triangle, the Swiss Finance Institute has the same endeavour as the planned European Institute of Technology (EIT). The core question of the Swiss Science Briefing 2007 was therefore if, and to what extent, the Swiss Finance Institute could serve as a model for the European Union in shaping the EIT.

The presentation of Mr Danthine can be found on SwissCore's website:
http://www.swisscore.org/events/ssb/20071009_SSB_Danthine.pdf