

# SwissCore Synopsis

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## ♦ Seen from Brussels

### **April – a month of ideas?**

The bi-annual Informal Competitiveness Council traditionally gives the acting Presidency of the EU and Research Ministers from the Member States, Candidate Countries and Associated States the opportunity to debate about new – and not so new – ideas regarding research and innovation in Europe. This spring, the Slovenian Presidency had the opportunity to take stock of last year's European Research Area (ERA) Green Paper consultation and to coalesce the diverse proposed measures into one coherent picture. This exercise, supported by a recently published Commission staff document summarizing the results of the ERA consultation (p. 5), led the Research Ministers to propose a new long-term "ERA vision" that should be endorsed before the end of 2008. In addition, the political governance of the ERA was also addressed. The "ERA governance" should mainly be managed through the Open Method of Coordination and will be carried forward under the name of "the Ljubljana Process". It remains to be seen if these ideas will fall on fruitful grounds and will lead to concrete coordination measures.

Another famous idea, this time from Commission President Barroso, is slowly but surely taking shape: the European Commission has issued a call for research, education and innovation experts (who should preferably be experts in all three of them) to sit on the Governing Board of Barroso's brainchild, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) (p. 6). These enlightened minds will have the mission to lead the currently financially crippled Institute into action and fame, thereby attracting the monies that European industry would be willing to throw at them in the sight of so much excellence.

To continue on the same theme, the Ideas Programme of FP7, also known as the European Research Council (ERC), has launched a series of calls for grants for advanced scientists (the Advanced Grants), whose last deadline closed on 22 April. A mere 766 proposals have been received for the "Life Sciences" domain, adding to the 997 for "Physical Sciences and Engineering" and the 403 for "Social Sciences and Humanities". The total of 2166 received proposals will be divided amongst the 25 evaluation panels, leading to an average of 8 proposals for each panel member. This number is a far cry from the approximately 40 proposals each panel member had to manage in the call for ERC Starting Grants. A beneficial effect of the low submission rate is that the average success rate for the Advanced Grants will exceed 10%, which is more than three times the rate measured for the Starting Grants (3%). Moreover, having less proposals to evaluate will allow the peer reviewers to take the time to pick the really bright ideas without having to rely on faster, but less thorough screening methods. Maybe it needs to be reminded here that the declared mission of the ERC is to fund "frontier research", and not just excellent "mainstream" research...

## ♦ Research

### *7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (FP7)*

#### **First loans backed by the Risk-Sharing Finance Facility**

On 3 April, the European Commission (EC) informed delegates from Member States and Associated Countries about the progress made with the Risk-Sharing Finance Facility (RSFF). This new and somewhat unorthodox instrument under FP7 was devised as a way to ease the access to debt financing for organisations and enterprises undertaking risky R&D projects with expected returns of value. Indeed, the RSFF is not a funding instrument for FP7 project consortia, but rather a mechanism to give individual project participants the possibility to obtain classic bank loans. As a result, these loans will have to be repaid by the beneficiary; moreover, the rate of interest will not be discounted as loans will be issued at market prices. However, having the RSFF backing these loans allows the banks issuing them to consider more risky projects than they would usually do (so-called sub-investment-grade projects).

To issue such loans, an RSFF cooperation agreement was signed on 5 June 2007 between the EC's DG Research and the European Investment Bank (EIB). In the frame of this agreement, the EIB will run the operational arm of the RSFF for the EC; to this effect, a contribution of €1 billion from the FP7 budget (€800 million from Cooperation and €200 million from Capacities) will be gradually transferred to the EIB, which will match this amount from its own funds. This money will be used to cover the risk of loans issued either by the EIB or by partnering organisations, and most of it is expected to be recovered when the loan is repaid. The EIB will issue loans of more than €7.5 million to single legal entities in Member States and Associated Countries for R&D or innovation projects, according to its own internal procedures. Smaller loans, focussed especially at SMEs will be issued by partnering banks or funds (see below). During 2007, the EIB has started its RSFF activities with a few "pathfinder initiatives" geared towards specific sectors (engineering/automotive, energy, ICT, life sciences and research infrastructures). The major clients for these loans directly issued by the EIB were up to now mid-sized industry. A volume of €888 million in loans has so far been allocated. Several European mid-sized companies in six different countries have profited from loans ranging from €30 million to €150 million.

In the future, in addition to deepening the geographical and sectoral scope, the EIB wants to develop its activities for research infrastructures, for SMEs and for university-industry clusters. To this effect, partners will be sought in different countries; these need not necessarily to be banks, they could also be funds or associations from specific sectors, which would then issue the loans to e.g. SMEs. For research infrastructures, a new instrument has been created together with ESFRI (European Strategic Forum for Research Infrastructures) and for life sciences, a new type of framework is being created together with the large pharmaceutical industry. For universities, the EIB envisions collaborations linked to technology transfer agreements or clusters with industry.

The EC and the EIB will present regular updates of their activities to the Member States and Associated Countries, the next one being planned for autumn.

More information on the RSFF can be found under:

<http://www.eib.org/products/loans/special/rsff/>

### **EUROSTARS gets the go-ahead from the European Parliament**

On 10 April the European Parliament approved community funding for the EUROSTARS programme that aims supporting R&D driven SMEs. The 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme will pay €100 million in the joint programme, which corresponds to one fourth of the public funding. Participating countries are expected to contribute €300 million for the duration of the programme from 2008 to 2013. The adoption in first reading has been facilitated due to an informal agreement, previously negotiated between Council and Parliament.

EUROSTARS is a joint programme of currently 30 countries, including Switzerland. From 2008 to 2013 the programme will fund transnational R&D projects, in which at least two partners from EUROSTARS member countries have to be involved. The Commission's funding for each project will be up to 25% of the funding of the EUROSTARS member states for the same project. Involvement of universities and industry in projects is possible, but the main part of R&D has to be conducted by SME's. Additionally, these projects have to be coordinated by SME's. Small consortia with two to three partners and a budget of about €1.4 million are preferred. The funding of project partners happens according to national rules, but projects get evaluated in Brussels. EUROSTARS is a bottom-up funding scheme and supports R&D projects which are already close to the market. Projects should not last longer than three years. It is expected that results of R&D can be transformed into products within two years after the project has ended.

The EUROSTARS programme as well as the Ambient Assisted Living programme (see Synopsis 2008/3) still needs the approval of the Council. This is expected either for the 14 or the 29/30 May. Nevertheless, it is already possible to submit proposals. The next application submission deadline is 21 November.

For more information on EUROSTARS refer to the following website:  
<http://www.eurostars-eureka.eu/>

## **EU Research Policy**

### **New ERA Board established**

One of the immediate measures that followed from last year's European Research Area (ERA) Green Paper was the replacement of the European Union Research Advisory Board (EURAB), by a newly established European Research Area Board (ERAB) with a supposedly enhanced role and extended mission (see Synopsis 2007/8). The Commission Decision of 7 December 2007 establishing the ERAB was published on 14 February 2008 in the Official Journal of the EU and the new Board has consequently been officially established on 1 March 2008.

On 11 April, the Commission announced the names of the 22 members of the ERAB, which had been selected by a four-person identification committee. Amongst them are for example Sir David King, former Chief Scientific Adviser of the UK Government, Robert Aymar, Director General of CERN, Alain Pompidou, former Director of the European Patent Office (EPO) and Frank Gannon, former Executive Director of the European Molecular Biology Organisation (EMBO). The Board also counts a member from Switzerland, Barbara Haering, CEO of Econcept (a consulting firm specialising in environment, transport and energy).

The members of ERAB come from both the academic and the business field and should provide "independent and authoritative advice" to the European Commission on science policy. One of the main tasks of this new Board will be to provide an annual report on the "state of the European Research Area". The originally foreseen task of the ERAB to organise a regular consultation of the stakeholders has unfortunately not been written down in the Commission Decision and it is therefore questionable if this planned mandate will be maintained. If this is the case, it is to be seen if the Commission will be able to "enhance the role" of the new ERA Board or if the latter will just remain a simple successor of its predecessor EURAB.

The list of the members of ERAB and further information can be found under:  
<http://ec.europa.eu/research/erab/>

### **Gender policy in research: getting more women to the top**

*By Juliane Sauer, Swiss National Contact Point for Mobility and Potential*

"There is no problem" seems to be the underlying attitude within the scientific community towards any gender-related issue. According to Johannes Klumpers of the European Commission, strong efforts have been made throughout the past years from many sides to support gender-balanced work and life; however, many problems still remain, as shown at the lunch debate on the report "Mapping the Maze – getting more women to the top" tabled in April by the Women in Research Decision Making (WIRDEM) Expert Group.

In her presentation of the report, Maya Widmer, Chair of the WIRDEM Expert Group and responsible for gender equality in research funding at the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), pointed out that in particular in positions where important decisions are made – for future funding, for nomination and appointing procedures – women are still underrepresented. According to the She Figures 2006 (see Synopsis Research 2006/2), from which the report draw part of its data, the percentage of female academic staff in higher positions is 15% – a clear under-representation. Also, women earn significantly less than men in the same scientific positions. Potential for change is seen in different areas:

- Gender-balanced funding;
- Gender-balanced appointment procedures;
- Ongoing quality management;
- Gender-oriented policies.

These can be approaches towards a truly gender-balanced life and work in science. Maya Widmer pointed out that commitment and awareness – admitting that "there *is* a problem" – is

indispensable for a sustainable change of the scientific community. The lively discussion led by Maren Jochimsen, director of EPWS (European Platform of Women Scientists), which followed the presentation highlighted the need for a figure-based report in order to follow the presentation's summary: "We must act now."

The report can be found under:

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.topic&id=1541>

## ***Publications***

### **Draft guide on how to mix different EU funding sources**

A hands-on guide, entitled "Synergies in funding opportunities between: 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme for Research (FP7), Competitiveness & Innovation Programme (CIP) and Structural Funds" has been released by the European Commission to help researchers to find the right programme for their activities. In order to identify the most suitable choices among the relevant programmes, the guide provides a six-points checklist covering questions regarding the eligibility of the organisation or company, eligibility of the planned activity, the timeframe, the identity of any other partners involved as well as the type of financial support needed. By answering these questions with the help of the scorecard, the score will indicate from which source (FP7, CIP and Structural Funds) the project idea can profit.

The main objective of the guide is to show the possibilities of using funding schemes from the three different programmes in a complementary way; different funding sources may support different phases of the development of a technology over time. Moreover, the three funding programmes share a common timeframe (2007-2013) and the role of the regions in research is taken into account in both FP7 and CIP.

In order to make the guide even more practical and useful, the European Commission sought feedback from the research community and will soon provide a regularly updated online version of the guide based on the comments received.

The guide can be found under: [ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/practical-guide\\_en.pdf](ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/practical-guide_en.pdf)

The checklist can be found under: [ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/check-list-guide\\_en.pdf](ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/check-list-guide_en.pdf)

### **Results of the ERA Green Paper consultation**

On 2 April, one year after the publication of the European Research Area (ERA) Green Paper (see Synopsis 2007/2), the European Commission tabled the final results of last year's public consultation in a Staff Working Document. This paper presents a detailed analysis of the outcome of the consultation and allows getting a view of the priorities different stakeholders place on the six measures proposed by the Commission in its Green Paper. Moreover, a list of all the organisations that participated in the consultation is annexed to the document. This paper will be useful for policy makers when assessing the concrete measures that will be proposed by the Commission during this year (see Synopsis 2008/1).

The Commission Staff Working Document can be found under:

[http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/comm-pdf-sec-2008-0430-1-documentdetravail\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/comm-pdf-sec-2008-0430-1-documentdetravail_en.pdf)

### **New guidelines for cost certification**

Under the somewhat esoteric title of "Certificates issued by external auditors – guidance notes for beneficiaries and auditors", the European Commission has published a new guide for the preparation of the "Certificates on the Financial Statements (CFS)" and diverse "Certificates on the Methodology (CoM)". CFS is the FP7 terminology for the FP6 Audit Certificates; while the CoM are a new way of having the financial statements of a beneficiary (FP7 term for participant) checked ex-ante rather than ex-post. The novelty with all these certificates delivered by an independent auditor (or competent public officer) is that a precise protocol of auditing has to be

followed: the principle prevalent under FP6 of the audit based on the auditor's assurance is replaced by a so-called audit based on a report of factual findings under FP7. This means that not only the beneficiaries, but also the auditors, will have to familiarise themselves with the new guidelines. In effect, the new guide seems mostly aimed at the auditors who will have to issue the certification based on factual findings, but will also certainly be of invaluable help for financial administrators of universities and research centres who are tuning their systems to the new FP7 rules.

The guide for cost certification can be found under:

[ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/guidelines-audit-certification\\_en.pdf](ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/guidelines-audit-certification_en.pdf)

## **Innovation**

### **The EIT looks for its “wise people”**

On 11 April, the European Commission opened the second consultation phase for the identification of the members of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Governing Board (see Synopsis 2008/3). While the first phase, which extended from 10 to 28 March, had to goal to define the selection criteria for Governing Board members, the second phase, closed on 25 April, concentrated on the submission of candidates. The short time window in which this second phase of the consultation was open seems intentional, as it likely prevents the identification committee in charge of selecting the Board members from being flooded by submissions.

Based on the selection criteria defined after the first consultation stage, Governing Board members should act in their “personal capacity, independent from any political, governmental, academic, institutional, industrial or other specific interests”. The Board should include representatives from “innovation, research, business and academia worlds at all stages of their career, taking into account geographical and gender balance”. Moreover, members should have a “documented capacity to take strategic decisions, high-level networking abilities with relevant players within and outside the EU and a “proven record in promoting academia-business cooperation and knowledge transfer”. These and many other criteria defined as a result of the first phase will most likely contribute to further restrict the field of candidates. In view of these criteria, it remains to be seen if the European Commission will be able to identify 18 people of such calibre that are willing to devote a substantial amount of their time to the strategic leading of the EIT.

The selection criteria for the EIT Governing Board members can be found under:

[http://ec.europa.eu/eit/selection\\_criteria\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/eit/selection_criteria_en.htm)

### **Commission makes recommendations on management of IP in knowledge transfer**

On 10 April, the European Commission published recommendations for a better management of intellectual property (IP), resulting from public research. This publication is a follow-up to the communication on knowledge transfer, published last year. The recommendations shall mainly help at making the EU national systems more coherent, at boosting transnational academia-industry cooperation and to turn more research into innovative and lucrative business results. The recommendations target ministries dealing with national knowledge transfer strategies as well as universities and public research institutions.

The main measures mentioned in the text are increased collaboration between universities and industry, licensing from universities to industry and the creation of spin-off companies. In all those activities, the management of IP is crucial. The recommendations therefore list some key principles for public authorities to help establishing or adapting their IP and knowledge transfer policies, including funding aspects. Through their implementation the management of IP and knowledge in public research institutions could be handled more systematically and professionally in the future.

A “Code of Practice” annexed to the recommendations gives universities and public research organisations operational guidelines which can be used when developing their IP policies.

The full text of the recommendations can be found here:

[http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/ip\\_recommendation\\_de.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/ip_recommendation_de.pdf)

## **Publications**

### **CIP ICT Policy Support Programme: Work Programme 2008**

At an Info day on 23 April, the Work Programme 2008 of the ICT Policy Support Programme (ICT PSP) has been presented. ICT PSP is one of the three pillars of the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP). ICT PSP has a budget of €730 million for 2007 to 2013, whereof €52 million will be distributed in 2008 and another €105 million in 2009.

The policy context of the ICT Policy Support Programme is the i2010 initiative, a flagship policy initiative for the renewed Lisbon Strategy. i2010 shall enable Europe to exploit the full potential of ICT and media for growth and employment.

The Work Programme 2008 of ICT PSP focuses on a set of themes and horizontal actions. The main themes are:

- ICT for user friendly administrations, public services and inclusion
- ICT for energy efficiency and sustainability in urban areas
- Consensus building, experience sharing on Internet evolution and security

Within those three main themes a set of up to six objectives can be found. Those objectives will be supported with either pilots building on Member States actions (focus on interoperability), or pilots stimulating new actions in the public and private sector. Additionally, there will be also calls for thematic networks. The call 2008 will be launched on 29 April and close on 9 September.

More information on ICT PSP and the Work Programme 2008 can be found here:

[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/ict\\_psp/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/ict_psp/index_en.htm)

### **Final report on Entrepreneurship in higher education**

The expert report is an outcome of a project under the Multiannual Programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (2001-2005). It recognises the important role of education in promoting more entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours. However, the report says that the teaching of entrepreneurship is not yet sufficiently integrated in the higher education institutions curricula. The authors doubt whether Business Schools are the most appropriate places to teach entrepreneurship, as innovative and viable business ideas are more likely to arise from technical, scientific and creative studies. The report includes a bundle of recommendations, addressing public authorities and universities, but also Business associations and the European Commission.

The full report can be found here:

[http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/support\\_measures/training\\_education/entr\\_highed.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/support_measures/training_education/entr_highed.pdf)

## **Education**

### **Free way for the Member States to adopt the European Qualifications Framework**

After having been formally adopted by the European Parliament (EP) in October 2007 (see Synopsis 2007/9) and by the Council of Education Ministers in February 2008 (see Synopsis 2008/2), the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF-LLL) has been co-signed by the Presidents of the EP and Council on 23 April, finalising now the political process of this Commission’s initiative launched in the context of the Lisbon strategy.

As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training as well as higher education. It applies to all types of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training.

The core of the EQF are the eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – learning outcomes – , regardless of where a particular qualification – learning inputs – was acquired. The three highest levels correspond to the higher education levels defined under the European Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area in the context of the Bologna process (see Synopsi s 2007/9).

During the first SwissCore Education Seminar (see p. 10), the EQF-LLL was presented in detail. Following the recommendation of the European Commission on a voluntary basis, countries such as France, Ireland, Malta and the United Kingdom translated their national qualifications levels into those of the EQF. More than 20 other EU countries are currently working on this same development. Many candidate countries and third countries showed their interest in the system. The main beneficiaries of the EQF will be employers and workers looking for jobs outside their country, which will facilitate the interpretation of the level of each qualification.

FAQ about the EQF can be found under:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/08/265&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>

### **New credit system to boost mobility in vocational education and training**

On 10 April, the European Commission presented a proposal for a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Since vocational education and training systems in Europe are very fragmented and complex, ECVET aims at encouraging trainees to complete their courses in different training establishments by removing the main obstacles of transnational mobility like national differences in identification, validation and recognition of learning outcomes. The ECVET system defines units of learning outcomes and associates them with a number of credit points. Qualification-awarding authorities in the Member States (MS) are thus able to translate learning outcomes and associated credits acquired somewhere else into their own vocational training qualifications systems.

ECVET is built on the success of ECTS, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System in higher education developed within the Bologna process. It is supposed to be not only fully compatible with the ECTS system but also with national systems in vocational education and training.

The new initiative takes the form of a recommendation and MS will be free to adopt it on a voluntary basis. Together with a separate recommendation for a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) which aims at increasing the transparency and consistency of policy developments in this field, the ECVET-initiative will first be submitted to the European Parliament and the Council for approval.

The EC proposal can be downloaded under the following link:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/ecvet/com180\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/ecvet/com180_en.pdf)

More information on ECVET can be found here:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/ecvet/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/ecvet/index_en.html)

## ***Publications***

### **Third joint progress report of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme published**

At its spring meeting held in March, the European Council adopted the 2008 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, entitled “Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation” (see Synopsi s 2008/2). This is the third progress report since the Ministers of education adopted

a report on the future objectives of education and training system in 2001, which was followed by a 10-year Working Programme.

The report is based on cross-country analysis of the progress described in national reports received from the 32 participating countries (27 Member States, 3 of the European Economic Area and 2 Candidate Countries) and shows in which areas progress has been made, gives a picture where progress remains insufficient and proposes measures to be taken for further improvements. As a result, the report refers to the following three areas where particular effort will be essential:

- Raising skill levels: continuing high level of early school leavers, low participation in lifelong learning by old workers and low skilled migrants are problematic issues in most countries.
- Implementation of lifelong learning strategies: progress has been made in defining unified and overarching strategies. However, many countries avoid putting effort in innovative learning partnerships and sustainable funding for high quality, efficient and even-handed education and training. Above all, the growth of investment appears to have decreased.
- Fortification of the knowledge triangle (education-research-innovation): the triangle plays a fundamental role in boosting jobs and growth and much more effort needs to be done to promote excellence in higher education and to enable university-business partnerships.

The full report with all the results can be downloaded under the following link:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st05/st05723.en08.pdf>

## **SwissCore Küche**

### **SwissCore Annual Event 2008 hosted by the State Secretary Dell’Ambrogio**

On 9 April, SwissCore hosted its 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Event, a reception to thank its Brussels colleagues and contacts for the good collaboration during the past years. This year’s host was the new State Secretary for Education and Research, Mauro Dell’Ambrogio, who was in Brussels for his first official visit at the EU level. SwissCore welcomed more than 120 invitees from the European Commission, IGLO and other research, innovation and education organisations in Brussels, confirming the numerous contacts that SwissCore is keeping in the different working networks.



*D. Imboden, SNSF*



*J. de Watteville, Mission of  
Switzerland to the EU*



*M. Dell’Ambrogio, State Secretariat  
for Education and Research*



### **First SwissCore Education Seminar presented the current EC education priorities**

On 18 April, SwissCore organised for the first time an event focusing on the priorities of the European Commission in the field of education. The SwissCore Education Seminar 2008 allowed Swiss education actors from universities and ministries, delegates from the cantonal educational structures as well as Brussels-based education experts to get first-hand information on the latest European education policy developments, such as the status of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, the implementation of the latest Action Plan for Adult education and the coordination of the European Qualifications Framework with the National Qualifications Framework (see article above p. 7). This new event gave the participants the opportunity to discuss and address questions directly to the experts from the Commission. It raised the awareness of the currently developed initiatives developed by the European Commission in the field of education and the possible ways for Switzerland to get involved. All presentations can be found on SwissCore website.

### **Swiss networking in Brussels: 15th SwissCore apéro**

For its traditional networking apéro, SwissCore welcomed on 10 April more than 20 newly arrived and more established Swiss expats working in Brussels for European institutions, Swiss representations, lobby organisations or studying in Belgium as Erasmus students. SwissCore and the Swiss Mission to the EU presented their activities to reinforce the presence and the visibility of Switzerland in Brussels in the field of research, innovation and education. As usual, this was the opportunity to network with Swiss actors in Brussels, but also to give those who are soon returning to Switzerland a flavour of how Swiss institutions can network and be active in the European capital.