

SwissCore Synopsis

June 2008

2008 / 6

♦ Seen from Brussels

- Progress and delays before the holidays 2

♦ Research

7th Framework Programme – FP7

- Low numbers but high quality of submissions for ERC Advanced Grants 2
- Eurostars and AAL adopted by the Council of Ministers 3

EU Research Policy

- Euraxess: a new mobility portal to enhance researchers' careers 4

Publications

- Guidelines for amendments to the Grant Agreement 5
- IMI and Clean Sky look for their director 5

♦ Innovation

- The EIT finally finds its location 5
- EU Community patent: Slovenian Presidency mentions some progress 6

Publications

- Aho report on the lack of EU High-Tech innovation funding 6
- European Business Awards for the Environment 7
- Report on state of business and academia partnerships in Europe 7
- Call for ERASMUS for Young Entrepreneurs 7

♦ Education

- Erasmus Mundus expands 8
- Awards for Mobility projects of Lifelong Learning Programme 9
- New network for linguistic diversity launched 9
- First conference on the implementation of the EQF 10
- Informal Lifelong Learning officially recognised in many EU Member States 10
- Website provides information on studying in Europe 10

♦ SwissCore Küche

- First Swiss Innovation Briefing highlights ICT research from Switzerland 11

This edition of the SwissCore Synopsis as well as previous editions are available on our website.

SwissCore - Contact Office for European Research, Innovation and Education, Rue du Trône 98, B-1050 Bruxelles
Tel +32-2-549 09 80, Fax +32-2-549 09 89, infodesk@swisscore.org, <http://www.swisscore.org>

♦ Seen from Brussels

Progress and delays before the holidays

While everyone is getting ready to leave for summer vacation, the European Commission has been busy pushing forward certain dossiers, while pulling the brakes on others. Indeed, a decision on the location of the administrative headquarters of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) has been taken, way ahead of the deadline fixed by the regulation (p. 5). Moreover, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament just adopted two initiatives under Article 169, Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) and Eurostars (p. 3). The evaluation of the submitted proposals for the European Research Council (ERC) Advanced Grants is moving ahead; statistics on these submissions have just been published (p. 2). All four Joint Technology Initiatives are looking for executive directors for their respective Joint Undertakings (p. 5 and Synopsis 2008/5). The field of education is also buzzing with activity, with new calls, awards and networks launched (p. 8).

On the other hand, we learn that the batch of FP7 calls planned for mid-July will not come out before September. This is problematic in the sense that the deadlines for submission will apparently not be postponed. This will dramatically shorten the time scientists have to build up a consortium and preparing their project. The unofficial answer of European Commission staff to this issue is that they consider that most scientists had access to drafts of the Work Programmes anyway. If this is the case, why not simply put these already well known drafts on the Cordis website ...

In addition, a call for staff for the two FP7 Executive Agencies (EA), the ERCEA and the REA (Research Executive Agency), has been cancelled. This will further delay the setting up of these agencies which are essential for the good functioning of critical parts of FP7 (like the ERC and Marie Curie). In the end, it might indeed be the researchers who pay the price of these administrative difficulties in the setup of the ERCEA and the REA.

In view of this stop-and-go activity, some people might reminisce about the traffic jams that expect them on their way to warmer parts of Europe...

♦ Research

7th Framework Programme (FP7)

Low numbers but high quality of submissions for ERC Advanced Grants

On 26 June, the European Research Council (ERC) published the official statistics of the submissions to the call for Advanced Grants. As previously reported (see Synopsis 2008/3), the total number of submissions was relatively low compared to the Starting Grants: only 2167 submissions for Advanced Grants were counted, of which 997 fell in the domain "Physical Sciences and Engineering", 766 in "Life Sciences" and 404 in "Social Sciences and Humanities". The statistics further show that 50 nationalities are represented, of which Swiss nationals represent about 2%; these scientists work at institutions in 36 different countries. Swiss institutions host about 4.5% of the total (including CERN). The average age of the applicants is 52, while the percentage of female applicants lays at a low 14%.

Despite the low total number, the ERC President, Fotis Kafatos, underscored the high quality of the submissions. It therefore seems that the high hurdle for the Starting Grants acted as deterrent to scientists applying to the Advanced Grants, leaving the field to the most excellent European researchers.

The same week, the ERC also issued several guidance documents:

- The Guide for ERC Grant Holders (in two parts): this guide contains all information necessary to manage both the Starting and Advanced Grants; part I contains general guidance notes, while part II specifically addresses the financial administration and management of these grants. The points specific to the ERC are conveniently highlighted in these documents.

- The Guide for ERC Peer Reviewers: this guide spells out the rules and regulations applying to scientists reviewing the Advanced Grants. It notably addresses such subjects as conflicts of interest, the tasks of the panel meetings and the approach to interdisciplinary proposals.

Further to this, the ERC also announced, on 19 June, that next to France, Italy, Switzerland and Spain, Sweden would provide funding for successful Starting Grant applicants which are beyond the funding capacity of the ERC.

The statistics on the Advanced Grants submissions can be found under:

http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/PressRelease_ERC_AdG1_step1_Statistics.pdf

The Guide for Grant Holders can be found under:

http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ERC_GrantHolders_PartI_June08.pdf and

http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ERC_GrantHolders_PartII_June08.pdf

The Guide for ERC Peer Reviewers can be found under:

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

Eurostars and AAL adopted by the Council of Ministers

The two joint research initiatives Eurostars and Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) got the approval of the Council of Ministers on 23 and 24 June. Both research programmes got already the go ahead from the European Parliament in March and April 2008 (see Synopsis 2008 3 and 4).

20 EU Member States as well as Israel, Norway and Switzerland will participate in AAL. This new Joint research initiative is not only considered as a mean to respond to the growing demographic challenge and to facilitate the life of elder people, but also as an economic opportunity for European companies. As elder people are important consumers, innovative products and new technologies targeting this group could be of benefit for Europe's ICT industry. The European Commission sees Europe even in the position of becoming a lead market for "ageing well" technologies. AAL shall therefore give a further boost to Europe's ICT industry in order to gain as soon as possible world leadership in those technologies. The six year programme is expected to amount to a total budget of €600 million: €150 million being taken from FP7, €150 million coming from the participating countries and €300 million from industry. Through the integration of national R&D efforts in the same area costly duplication of research activities can be avoided in the future. The first call for proposals has been launched in April and will close on 21 August. The electronic proposal submission system can be found on the below mentioned AAL Website.

The Eurostars joint programme brings together 26 EU Member States. Additionally, Iceland, Israel, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey will also participate. Eurostars is a bottom up funding scheme, targeting close-to-the-market R&D of high tech SME's in all industrial sectors. As AAL, Eurostars is a transnational programme. At least two SME's from two participating countries have to be involved in a project. It is possible that also industry or universities take part, but projects have to be coordinated by an SME. Eurostars will last from 2008 to 2013 and foresees an overall budget of about €400 million, €100 coming from FP7 and €300 million from participating countries. The European Commission's contribution will be up to 25% of the funding of Eurostars member states for the same project. Small consortia with up to three partners and a budget of around €1.4 million are targeted. Research projects should not last longer than three years and results should be transformed into products within two years after the project has ended. The next application submission deadline is 21 November. Detailed information on how to submit a proposal can be found on the Eurostars Website.

More information on AAL and Eurostars can be found here:

<http://www.aal-europe.eu/>

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

Euraxess: a new mobility portal to enhance researchers' careers

On 24 June, the European Commission unveiled its new web portal and services "Euraxess" on the occasion of the 5th Anniversary of the European Researcher's Mobility Portal.

The European Research Mobility Portal (ERMP) was launched in July 2003, followed by the European network of mobility centres (ERA-MORE) in June 2004. Moreover, a third initiative called "ERA-LINKS US" started in 2005. This last initiative was created to reverse the European "brain-drain" that had existed since the 70's. As the European Commissioner for Science and Research Janez Potocnik, mentioned: "the path to knowledge in Europe is often obscured by too dispatched information on available career opportunities, language and cultural barriers".

As a result, the European Commission decided to increase researchers' employment opportunities, their network with other researchers and organisation as well as the clarity of its aid policy for researchers' mobility by grouping all the initiatives and services under a single portal called "Euraxess". The Euraxess website provides a single access point to information and support services divided into four categories:

1. Euraxess Services: this subsection englobes the former ERA-MORE network and provides all information for relocation assistance during and after researchers move abroad. There are around 200 mobility centres in Europe and numerous contact points set up by the participating Member States.
2. Euraxess Jobs: this field comprises all information on job opportunities funded by the Marie Curie Actions and grants. It also facilitates employment by publishing vacant posts in research establishments in Europe and replaces the previous ERMP. This portal aims at helping researchers to advance their career in another European country as well as providing a single recruitment platform for organisations wishing to employ European and non-European researchers.
3. Euraxess Rights: this category includes all information regarding the Charter and Code (C&C). On 11 March 2005, the "European Researchers' Charter and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers" was adopted by the European Commission and constitutes a framework proposed to Member States to improve the careers of researchers. The Charter addresses both researchers and employers on minimum rights and obligations, and the Code of Conduct is a reference point for transparency and merit-based recruitment.
4. Euraxess Links: this last initiative is a networking tool for European researchers, scientists and scholars abroad, which aims at helping expatriate researchers to collaborate with colleagues in Europe or to return to rewarding careers in Europe. Euraxess Links includes the former ERA-LINKS in the USA. Since June 2008, the programme has had an additional international dimension by including Japan. The aim of this second dimension is exactly the same as the first one with the USA. The idea of a European-Japanese collaboration on this initiative was born at the 15th Summit between the EU and Japan in Tokyo on 24 April 2006.

On the occasion of the creation of a new Euraxess portal gathering all the former initiatives and services, the European Commission set up a new logo and made the website more interactive. Moreover, four different colours associated to the four different initiatives were introduced in order to improve the lack of clarity of the previous websites (yellow for Euraxess-Services, blue for Euraxess-Jobs, pink for Euraxess-Rights and green for Euraxess-Links). Now, the interactive portal and the colours provide a real added value and make access and browsing easier.

The new Euraxess mobility portal can be found under: http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index_en.cfm

Publications

Guidelines for amendments to the Grant Agreement

Recently the European Commission's DG Research published a new set of guidelines to help participants in FP7 to make amendments to the grant agreement. Such amendments are for example necessary when a new partner wants to join the consortium (e.g. to replace a defaulting one) or when major changes need to be made to the project due to new findings.

The guidelines can be found under:

ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/amendments-ga_en.pdf

IMI and Clean Sky look for their director

On 20 June, the European Commission has published a vacancy note for executive directors for two Joint Technology Initiatives (JTI), IMI (Innovative Medicines Initiative) and Clean Sky. The executive director will have following tasks:

- appointing and supervising the staff of the Joint Undertaking (JU, the legal entity implementing the JTI);
- prepare and implement the annual work and finance plans;
- supervise the call and project management process;
- manage the communication activities of the JU;
- provide support to the JU Governing Board.

To be able to fulfil these tasks, the candidates should combine strategic vision, management experience and leadership abilities, while having a good understanding of biopharmaceutical R&D and of the functioning of the EU institutions. A university degree plus 15 years of professional experience are required. The candidates must be nationals of the EU Member States or of countries associated to FP7; Swiss nationals are therefore eligible.

More details on the vacancies can be found under:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:155A:0001:s008:EN:PDF>

and

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:155A:0006:s012:EN:PDF>

Innovation

The EIT finally finds its location

On 18 June, the Research Ministers of the EU decided that the seat of the administrative headquarters of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) would be located in Budapest. A first discussion during an informal dinner in the frame of the Competitiveness Council (Council of Ministers) meeting of 29-30 June had seen the Hungarian capital gather the support of 26 Member States, with only Poland opposing this choice (see Synopsis 2008/5).

The negotiations held at a specially convened Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) resulted in Poland stepping down from its blocking minority position, thus allowing Budapest to win the race. It is unclear at this stage how much concessions Poland was able to extract from the other Member States; its first wish of being given preference in the selection of the Knowledge and Innovation Communities was rejected. Another demand apparently concerned the Governing Board, where it is likely that Poland asked for one of its nationals to become the chairperson. In the latest draft list of the Board members, a Polish candidate replaces one of the two previously listed French names.

The proposed members of the Governing Board have been selected by an identification committee set up by Education Commissioner Figel at the beginning of this year (see Synopsis 2008/2). The proposed list of members, which is still unofficial, finally contains nationals of 15

European countries, including Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany (2), Hungary, Italy, Netherlands (2), Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden (2), United Kingdom and even Norway. The repartition between academia and industry is somewhat biased towards the first one, as most of the proposed members coming from industry currently hold positions in academic institutions. Interestingly, the proposed Spanish member is Professor Castells, who recently stepped down from the Scientific Council of the ERC (see Synopsis 2008/5). The list of Governing Board candidates has been transmitted to the Council of the EU and to the European Parliament on 11 June, which have now one month to “take note of the results of the selection procedure” before the members are appointed by the European Commission. The official appointment of the Governing Board is therefore foreseen around 11 July.

EU Community patent: Slovenian Presidency mentions some progress

According to a short report presented to the EU Competitiveness Council at the end of May, the Slovenian EU Presidency could reach some achievements for a future Community patent (for the previous discussions during the German and Portuguese Presidency see Synopsis 2007/3 and 2007/9). However, despite those efforts it still remains uncertain when a final agreement on an EU patent will be reached.

Discussions during the Slovenian Presidency have focused on three main obstacles. The first one concerns the translation regime, where a majority of Member States favoured a novel solution using an automated computer translation into all official EU languages. However, those translations would not have legal status. For this reason, demands would have to be submitted into English, French and German, which would be the only official languages. Alternatively, the Slovenian Presidency proposed a flexible patent, letting the owner decide in which countries the claim would be protected; only translations into those languages would have legal status. The second point which hampers an agreement is the distribution of fees. Half of the revenues collected from annual patent renewals should go to the granting authority, for instance the European Patent Office (EPO). The other half should be distributed to the Member States, but the exact mechanism of distribution to Member States remains controversial. However, most delegations seemed to agree on the size of a Member State’s market and on the level of its patent activity to be the main criteria. Finally, the third obstacle is the litigation system. The Slovenian Presidency proposed a two-step model with a first instance level consisting of different regional panels, and a second instance deciding on appeals against verdicts issued at first instance. However, some Member States, headed by the United Kingdom, favour a litigation system based on an international treaty and falling outside EU jurisdiction.

The French delegation confirmed that it would take up the issue during its Presidency which started at the beginning of July.

The Slovenian progress report can be downloaded here:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st09/st09473.en08.pdf>

Publications

Aho report on the lack of EU High-Tech innovation funding

On 24 June, the leader of an expert group, former Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho, presented the results of an evaluation of EU ICT research funding and of the impact of the research results. Esko Aho, who is president of the Finnish Innovation Fund (Sitra), already headed an expert group which drafted a report on creating a more innovative Europe two years ago (see Synopsis Research 2006/1). Aho was also chairman of a steering group in charge of drafting the recently presented new Finnish innovation strategy, which seems to be more and more reflected in the EU innovation policy.

This new report highlights some of the strong areas of European ICT research, but also fields where further progress needs to be done. It contains 23 recommendations, stressing for instance the importance of Joint Technology Initiatives (JTI), the need to open up the Framework

Programme to the world, recommending creating a platform for high-growth companies to meet venture capital investors or to focus on certain areas instead of trying to become a world leader in every area. The report also states that highly innovative high-growth companies were up till now not well represented in the Framework Programme and that they can only be attracted through excellence in research and through reduction of administrative burdens. Indeed, many of the paragraphs are dealing with the need to simplify the Framework Programme, to make it more flexible and to develop a more trust-based approach towards participants.

Some broader policy recommendations make the link to innovation policy. The report stresses the need to focus not only on the supply side, for instance the Framework Programme. In fact, the push approach through R&D should be simultaneously completed by a pull approach through market demand. The recommended demand-oriented effort could mainly be strengthened through public procurement, for instance in the area of e-health or e-government. Additionally, standardisation could help to create new EU-wide markets. Finally, the European single market should be made more attractive for business angels and venture capitalists.

The report can be downloaded here:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/information_society/evaluation/data/pdf/fp6_ict_expost/ist-fp6_panel_report.pdf

European Business Awards for the Environment

On 3 June, the EU awarded companies that turn environmental challenges into entrepreneurial opportunities. The European Business Awards for the Environment recognises efforts from enterprises in combining environmental protection with innovation and economic impact. Eligible were companies from EU Member States and from Croatia and Turkey. Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas awarded 11 companies in four different categories. The main prize in the category “management award” went to Co-operative Group Ltd (UK) for its identification and measurement of key environmental, social and ethical impacts. The “Product Award” went to Austrian ertexsolar GmbH who manufactures high quality photovoltaic products. The “Process Award” was given to German CHOREN GmbH for the development of a process that allows producing high-purity biofuel from biomass. Finally, the “International Cooperation Award” went to KIT (Royal Tropical Institute) Holding/Mali BioCarburant SA (Netherlands) for a project that involves the production in Mali of biodiesel from nuts.

More information can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/awards/index_en.htm

Report on state of business and academia partnerships in Europe

The report, entitled “Responsible Partnering between Research and Business” and published by the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Research and Technology Organisations (EARTO), the European Industrial Research Management Association (EIRMA) and ProTon Europe, is an outcome of a conference which took place in Lisbon in December 2007. The report analyses the state of joint research between the public and private sector after the launch of the Responsible Partnering Initiative in 2004. It notes that European higher education is changing from a supply-driven to a demand driven system, giving more emphasis on knowledge transfer. The report also stresses the value of trust-based partnerships and open innovation as a key to turn more research results into marketable goods and services.

Information on the Responsible Partnering Initiative and the report can be found here:

<http://www.responsible-partnering.org/>

Call for Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs

On 12 June, the European Commission issued a call for proposals regarding Erasmus for young entrepreneurs. The purpose of this call is to provide grants to projects allowing starting EU entrepreneurs to acquire knowledge and experience in an experienced entrepreneur’s company in another Member State (see Synopsis 2008/1). The call for Erasmus for young entrepreneurs is

a pilot project that aims at ensuring that experience is exchanged and reinforced at European level for the benefit of starting EU entrepreneurs. The general objective is to support intra-EU partnerships for the purpose of implementing mobility schemes for them. The call comprises two different types of activities:

- European partnership enhancing the mobility of starting entrepreneurs, with a maximum duration of 18 months and a grant that cannot exceed €140.000.
- Coordination, support and networking at European level linked to the action mentioned in activity 1. The maximum duration is 22 months, with a grant up to €200.000.

Deadline for this call is 20 August 2008.

More information and the eligibility criteria can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/funding/files/themes_2008/calls_prop.htm

The call can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/funding/files/themes_2008/doc/ent_era_08_311/call.pdf

Education

Erasmus Mundus expands

For the academic year 2008-2009, the Erasmus Mundus Programme expands its partnership to 17 new educational establishments of third countries and increases the number of grants given.

The Erasmus Mundus Programme entered into force on 20 January 2004. This co-operation and mobility programme with third countries in the field of higher education has gone through a notable evolution since 2004. Especially in the fields of intensification of co-operation and exchange, in the number of applications as well as in the increase of opportunities for students and teachers, many improvements have been done over the years.

As a reminder, the first phase of the programme runs from 2004 to 2008 and has a budget of €230 million, of which 90% should be spent for scholarships. The programme comprises four actions: Erasmus Mundus Master Courses, Erasmus Mundus scholarships, partnerships and Enhancing Attractiveness (See Synopsis 2007/6). In addition to these actions, the European Commission (EC) launched the “Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window” at the beginning of 2007 (see Synopsis 2007/1). However, because of the ending of the first period in 2008, the EC adopted a new proposal for the Erasmus Mundus Programme of 2009-2013 on 12 July 2007 and transmitted the proposal to the Council of the EU and the European Parliament for a co-decision procedure. On 15 November 2007, the proposal was discussed by the Council of the EU and on 24 June the European Parliament’s Committee on Education and Culture adopted Erasmus Mundus II. As for the European Parliament, it is still on its first reading. The new programme aims at widening the currently running programme ending in 2008. The main new features are the inclusion of joint doctoral programmes, increased scholarships for European students and an intensified structural co-operation with third-country higher education institutions. The second phase of Erasmus Mundus should start in 2009 with a planned budget of €936.5 million.

Moreover, more than 2000 students and 450 teachers from third countries will receive Erasmus Mundus grants for the university year 2008-2009, against 140 third-country students for the university year 2004-2005. For 2008-2009, the students come from a total of 114 different third countries. China is at the top of the list with 244 students, followed by India with 164 students. At the same time, these partnerships will also allow 477 European students and 192 European teachers to gain experience in a third country. In addition to the increase of the budget, of scholarships and of the number of applicants, 17 new partnerships with educational establishments of third countries have been retained for 2008-2009; the programme will now cover 62 universities from 28 third countries.

On 6 and 7 June, the University of Perugia (Italy) hosted the fourth seminar of Erasmus Mundus students and the second general meeting of the Erasmus Mundus Association (EMA) of students of the programme. This yearly seminar aims at assessing the Erasmus Mundus programme with

students who participated. The conclusion of the fourth Erasmus Mundus seminar will be available soon. It is to hope that students were as enthusiastic as last year with the Erasmus Mundus Programme and that it could improve its main negative points. As a summary of last year's results of the third Erasmus Mundus seminar, 90% of the students were satisfied with the academic aspects and the teaching staff, 75% learned two European languages during their programme and over 80% considered that their expectations have been met. The main negative point was that 60% of the students struggled with administrative problems.

For more information regarding novelties of the EM Programme 2009-2013:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/doc/presentation2_fr.pdf

Awards for Mobility projects of Lifelong Learning Programme

On 13 June, a conference on "Quality in Mobility" hosted by the Slovenian Presidency of the EU in Ljubljana awarded 15 winning projects from 13 Member States for their mobility actions in the frame of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP).

Gold, silver and bronze prizes for these mobility projects have been awarded in these five categories:

1. Comenius, for school education: the gold prize was awarded to a bilateral School Partnership between Latvia and Czech Republic where pupils translated songs to their partner's language and rehearsed together.
2. Erasmus, for higher education: the gold prize was given to the Instituto Politécnico de Tomar in Portugal where students and staff from higher education institutions from several participating countries took part in an Intensive Programme (IPs) in archaeology.
3. Leonardo Da Vinci, vocational education and training: the first prize was awarded to the Danish Company "Falck" for its "exchange experience" project with its British counterpart "SF&RS" in the field of fire services.
4. Gruntvig, adult learning: the top prize was awarded to the "Centre Européen Juif d'Information" for its "Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Training" project that aims at recognising and respecting multicultural diversity.
5. Languages: best prize given to "CILT", the National Centre for Languages of London (UK) for its "Lingua@net Europa Plus" project that provides over 3.700 online learning resources.

Due to the large number of participating countries and the success of these projects, the EC would like to enhance participation to these mobility projects, and is already planning new actions for the coming years.

More details regarding the "Quality in Mobility" prizes can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/index_en.html

New network for linguistic diversity launched

On 11 June, a new network for linguistic diversity was launched by Multilingualism Commissioner Leonard Orban. This Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) is a co-funded network of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) 2007-2013. LLP provides €450'000 of the funds for this new network. The NPLD's aim is to promote and develop Europe's less used languages in collaboration with universities, research centre and NGOs.

In the context of a multilingual Europe, its members want to provide an independent voice for these autochthonous language communities (eg: El Pais Vasco, la Region Bretonne, Province of Fryslan, Wales) in order to seek greater international recognition and to secure linguistic equality. In the future the NPLD's main purpose is to provide input to the Council of the EU on matters related to language policy and linguistic diversity.

More details regarding membership and participation can be found under: <http://www.npld.eu>

First conference on the implementation of the EQF

On 3 and 4 June, the first conference on the implementation of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) was held in Brussels. The EQF was formally adopted by the European Parliament and the European Council on 23 April 2008 (see Synopsis 2007/9 and 2008/2). The conference gathered 230 people representing national authorities, social partners and other stakeholders to discuss practical issues around the Framework's implementation.

With its eight reference levels of qualification, this lifelong learning framework aims at creating a translating device to make qualifications readable, transparent and understandable to employers and institutions (see Synopsis 2008/4). Because of the different national and sectoral systems, the eight levels are based on learning outcome, which means that effective knowledge and capacities are considered instead of length of learning experience or type of institution. This European-compatible qualification system intends to make the comparison between the different national qualification systems easier.

In order to complete this purpose, Member States will have to relate their respective qualification systems to the EQF by 2010. From 2012 onwards it is expected that all companies and institutions will be able to refer to a clear guide for a better understanding of a candidate's qualifications.

More information about EQF can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html

Informal Lifelong Learning officially recognised in many EU Member States

The European Centre for the Development of Professional Training (CEDEFOP) is fulfilling its plan, which was to make Member States recognising and transposing in their respective national systems the European framework aiming at validating non-formal and informal learning. In fact, since the adoption of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) in April 2008, the adoption of a similar system regarding non-formal and informal learning has been considered as another tool to promote mobility. Thus, thanks to this framework aiming at mutual training and education standard recognition, European citizens will also improve their chance of getting a job in another European Member State as well as providing opportunities for disadvantaged or excluded people.

Within the implementation process CEDEFOP divides countries in three categories:

- Countries that have already implemented the framework and that are already in practice (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom).
- Countries where the process is being established (Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland and Sweden).
- Countries that have made little progress or where the subject is controversial. In these countries, the non-implementation or the little progress comes mainly from a resistance of national stakeholders or from a lack of legislative base or national concept of the non-formal and informal learning (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Slovakia and Turkey).

Information regarding common European principles for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning or about the implementation process can be found under:
http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/493/4073_en.pdf

Website provides information on studying in Europe

The Study in Europe-Website provides useful information about Europe's diverse university landscape. It advises on choosing a host country as well as a particular University. Additionally, information about study requirements can be found and links to other websites provide more information. All in all, 32 European countries are covered, including Switzerland.

The Website can be found here:

<http://www.study-in-europe.org/index.cfm?objectid=D4A8D186-3FFF-AEA2-32B627E7DA291125&CFID=83509&CFTOKEN=82856516>

First Swiss Innovation Briefing highlights ICT research from Switzerland

On 11 June, SwissCore and the Mission of Switzerland to the EU organised the first Swiss Innovation Briefing (see Synopsis 2008/5). The event showcased some recent research in the field of the Internet to our Brussels' contacts from the European Commission, EU liason offices and diverse other organisations. Presentations were given by Dr Marc Langheinrich (ETHZ), Prof. Karl Aberer (EPFL), Dr Herbert Bay (Kooaba) and Dr Florent Frederix (European Commission). Afterwards, the participants of the Swiss Innovation Briefing were invited to take part in an evening dedicated to networking and football in the courtyard of the Mission. Unfortunately, seen the result of the match Switzerland-Turkey which was live broadcasted on plasma screens, the evening ended with a disappointment for supporters of the Swiss national team. Nevertheless, Raclette, wine and a nice barbecue might have helped some of them to get over it.

