

SwissCore Synopsis

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Of Easter eggs and spring times

In the last weeks, spring has finally arrived in Brussels and the trees are burgeoning again. A feeling of renewal is sweeping through the streets, and even through the corridors of the Commission. The review of the European Research Council (ERC) is under way and major research organisations and funding agencies have been asked to submit their views until 24 April. Based on this rather tight timeframe for collecting input, we foresee the experts to proceed swiftly and deliver their vision of a refreshed and renewed ERC before the summer. If their report will come in time to distract the Members of the European Parliament (MEP) and the exiting Commissioners from their electoral activities remains to be seen, however.

Another review currently starts to preoccupy the Brussels research policy scene: the mid-term review of the 7th Research Framework Programme (FP7). Indeed, FP7 is due to be examined in 2010, and preparations are already ongoing, as exemplified by the many evaluation reports that pile up in our mail boxes. After last month's series of studies, a report on the Chinese participation to the Framework Programme is now in press (p. 4). Moreover, a response to the explosive Rietschel report (see Synopsis 2009/2) should be published any day by the European Commission. Ahead as always, at least in their strategic thinking, DG INFSO has just tabled its "strategy for ICT research, development and innovation", in which a substantial budgetary raise is asked, in order to get Europe out of the economic crisis (p. 5). Should budgetary shifts between the Themes of FP7 be discussed, DG INFSO has already collected the arguments to defend its piece of the cake.

This month Dossier is focusing on the EU Recovery Plan, asking what is in it for research and innovation. At first view, it could be quite a lot. Not only some joint cross-thematic calls in FP7, to be launched end of July, but possibly also new Joint Technology Initiatives, for instance in the field of manufacturing industry. Commissioner Potocnik tried to give some momentum to the idea of new Public Private Partnerships when meeting high-level representatives of European Industry on 30 March (p. 3).

Within this renewal context, the European Commission is also due to deliver a highly expected chocolate egg just before Easter. Undeniably, the so-called "transitional flat rate" for indirect costs under FP7 will change on 1 January 2010 from 60% to "not less than 40%". How much this should be is in the hands of the Commission, however, "based on an evaluation of participation" (*dixit* FP7 Rules for Participation). Due to the constraints of the budgetary cycle of the EU, this new indirect cost flat rate, which applies to participants like universities, should be set around Easter. Everyone is now anxious to see how sweet the chocolate egg will taste...

Another Easter egg, which was delivered on time, is the call for proposals for the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (p. 7).

This spring is also bringing inputs in the education field. At the end of March, not only Education Ministers met informally in Prague to discuss in which extend measures taken on the education policy level will combat the economic crisis. Also the European University Association (EUA) held its Convention in Prague during which Jean-Marc Rapp officially took over the EUA Presidency. The EUA underlined that universities have a key role as a motor for economic recovery by providing research based education at all levels needed to promote creativity and innovation.

In Brussels, the Commission organised a public debate on the future of education in Europe (p. 9) and settled the partnership between university and business as an important priority (p. 8). At the end of April, the Bologna Ministerial Conference will also tackle the achievements and future goals of the Bologna Process as presented during the SwissCore Higher Education Seminar (p. 10).

With all this spring-like renewal activity, it may be wise to remember a maxim that especially deploys its full meaning at Easter: Do not put all your eggs in the same basket...

Dossier: EU Recovery plan aims at boosting Public Private Partnerships in R&D

On 30 March, Commissioner Potocnik met high-level representatives of industry in Brussels to review progress and discuss further implementation of the three Public Private Partnerships announced earlier in the EU Recovery Plan (see Synopsis 2008/10).

Adopted by the European Commission in November 2008, the EU Recovery Plan highlights three domains of R&D projects that will be implemented in the form of Public Private Partnerships:

- The “Factories of the Future” initiative for the manufacturing sector (€1.2 billion for R&D)
- The “Energy-efficient Buildings” initiative for the construction sector (€1 billion for R&D)
- The “Green Cars” initiative for the automotive sector (€1 billion for R&D)

The European Commission hopes that a contribution of 50% to the total R&D budget will come from industry, matching the other 50% which will be taken from the FP7 budget. In the mid- to long term perspective this could lead to the establishment of new Joint Technology Initiatives. As a first step, ad-hoc industrial advisory groups as well as industrial research association have already been created in the last couple of weeks, preparing multi-annual Research Agendas and assessing the best way how to implement Public Private Partnerships. This way, industry is in the driving seat, having a leading role in the definition of the strategic priorities as well as in the implementation of the research. Thereby, the EC hopes to persuade European industry to make long-term commitments for R&D. Seen the current economic crisis such a long term commitment seems to be quite unrealistic, as many companies are just struggling for life.

A first step for these partnerships will be the publication of joint cross-thematic calls for research projects within FP7 by the end of July, aiming at giving a quick response to the crisis by using the existing instruments of the Framework Programme for Research. This concerns different Specific Programmes of FP7, namely ICT, NMP, Energy, Environment and Transport. This could allow the first projects to start in spring 2010. In this short term perspective no new funding mechanism will be created, but industry will be much more involved in the development and hopefully also in the implementation of research activities within FP7.

Not less than four different Directorate Generals are involved in research and innovation activities in the framework of the Recovery Plan: DG ENTR, DG INFSO, DG RTD and DG TREN. A leading role within the European Commission for the “Factories of the future” initiative as well as for the “Energy efficient buildings” initiative has Directorate G of DG RTD, whereas the “Green cars” initiative is managed by Directorate H of DG RTD together with DG ENTR. For “Factories of the Future” the European Technology Platform Manufature EU has been chosen by the European Commission as main partner for the further implementation of the Public Private Partnership. On 11 March, the High-Level Group of Manufature EU founded the European Factories of the Future Research Association (EFFRA) which is supposed to take over the role of the private partner in the further negotiations with the EC.

The following link provides an overview on the Recovery Plan measures targeting innovation:
<http://ec.europa.eu/research/index.cfm?pg=newsalert&lg=en&year=2009&na=ppp-310309>

EMRP in the European Parliament

At the beginning of 2008, the European Commission decided to boost European metrology research under the ERA-NET plus scheme and therefore created iMERA-Plus. This ERA-NET now constitutes the basis for the building up of an initiative according to Article 169 of the EU Treaty, which allows the European Commission to take part in research programmes of the Member States. The European Metrology Research Programme (EMRP) will be the third initiative of this kind, after Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) and Eurostars.

EMRP is expected to get support from 22 countries, among them non-EU Member States Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. All future Member States of EMRP are part of the European Association of National Metrology Institutes (EURAMET), which was founded in 2007. Switzerland is represented by the Federal Office of Metrology (METAS). EURAMET will also coordinate the implementation of EMRP. The budget of the research programme is expected to amount to €400 million, whereas €200 million come from Member States of EMRP and €200 millions from the FP7 budget. The metrology research programme is backed by the European Council and is currently discussed in the European Parliament. As there is no opposition to the initiative, approval of the Parliament can be expected very soon, most likely in the Parliaments' last session at the end of May.

More information on EMRP can be found here:

<http://www.emrponline.eu/>

EU Research Policy

Taking stock of the Chinese participation in the Framework Programme

An expert group led by Erik Arnold from Technopolis has evaluated the effects of the participation of researchers and companies from China in the EU Research Framework Programme. Their report, dated from February 2009, is due to be officially published by the European Commission in the coming weeks. We can already present here the main findings of this very extensive evaluation.

Building research relationships with China has been a priority for the EU from as early as the mid-1990, and Chinese participation in the Framework Programmes has been encouraged since 1999. As a result, the number of Chinese participants has nearly doubled between FP5 and FP6, mainly in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and environment projects. 80% of these participants are State research performers. On the EU side, the main partners are concentrated to Germany, UK, France, Italy and the Netherlands, which are countries with long-established scientific cooperation with China. In general, the EU partners found that the benefits of the Chinese participations outweighed their costs, even if the partners from China were usually not considered to be key players. The opinion about the established relationships with China was however mixed: EU companies were often frustrated by their inability to influence the setting of standards in China, while researchers often deplored the low rate of publications produced by the Chinese partners. Surprisingly, almost no respondents in the evaluation had experienced difficulties with intellectual property rights (IPR).

The study concludes that there is definitely an opportunity for the Framework Programme to play an important role in the highly fragmented international S&T collaborations with China. Indeed, many countries, including EU Member States, have S&T relations with China, but often with a lack of strategic focus. Since most of these bilateral activities focus on capacity building or basic science, the Framework Programme provides funding for joint activities in applied research, which is very attractive for Chinese scientists. A major threat is however the strong links that the US and Japan have already established with China in the field of research, mostly based on expatriates moving back to China from those countries.

Consequently, the experts recommend to the EU to use the 'human factor' for the S&T collaboration with China in a better way, for example through the enhancement of mobility schemes, not only at the junior, but also at the senior level (we would like to note that the latter has been partially fulfilled by the introduction of the IRSES scheme in Marie Curie). Not surprisingly, it also suggests a major budget increase for international cooperation with the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China). The third recommendation is the establishment of an "EUChinaLink", to provide networking services, science cooperation projects and mobility programmes. One recommendation (N.B. which could also apply to the EU itself) is to simplify the administrative approach of Chinese participation to the Framework Programme, for example through the use of lump-sums. Finally, the setting up of a common European platform should support S&T cooperation with China, not only at EU, but also at Member State level. According to

the evaluation, this would allow “de-fragmentation” of all these currently disparate and subcritical collaborations and increase their added value through better coordination.

This rather thick and arduous evaluation can however provide very useful indications when designing a strategy for S&T collaborations with China, not only via the EU Framework Programme. Indeed, the report is full of general information on the status of research in China, and on the international cooperation activities of European countries with China.

Publications

METRIS report

The METRIS (Monitoring European Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities) report, published in March 2009 by an expert group set up by the Commission, presents research trends in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH). Its findings are based on contributions of 14 senior researchers who were asked to identify emerging tendencies in the five priorities of the SSH part in the Cooperation programme under FP7, as well as name cross-cutting trends and give recommendations for further action. The proposals given were the following: major trends in society and their implications; growth, employment and competitiveness in a knowledge-based society; citizenship in modern Europe; economic, social and environmental objectives, including climate change; and Europe’s place and role in the world. Moreover, transversal research tendencies have been identified and together with above mentioned trends, some 10 cross-cutting themes for coordinated support actions in Europe have been identified. Furthermore, the report points out, that due to the fact that much know-how is stored in national research systems, an effort will be made to create a database that monitors public and private funding in SSH research across Europe.

The report can be downloaded under:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/metris-report_en.pdf

ENIAC Call 2009

The second call of the Joint Technology Initiative (JTI) ENIAC (European Nanotechnologies Initiative Advisory Group) under FP7 was published on 19 March 2009. ENIAC is one of currently five Joint Undertakings (JU) and typically publishes one call a year. This year’s call budget amounts to €37 million, paid for by the 19 ENIAC Member States. The participants have to submit their Project Outlines by 6 May 2009, those who passed the threshold will be asked to hand in Full Project Proposals by 3 September 2009.

The call fiche can be downloaded under:

<http://www.eniac.eu/web/calls/callforproposals.php>

◆ Innovation

For ICT research, development and innovation, the Commission asks for a raise

On 13 March 2009, the European Commission published its new “Strategy for ICT R&D and Innovation in Europe” with the subtitle “Raising the Game”. This strategy follows upon a request made by the European Council (Heads of State and Governments) in December last year and was supported by a public consultation on the future of ICT R&D and Innovation (R&D&I) (see Synopsis 2009/2).

One of the key messages of this Communication is that not only the game, but also the invested money should be raised. Indeed, the Commission sees ICT “providing vital tools to recover from the current economic slowdown”. Besides ICT leading the way out of the downturn, the other identified needs for the present strategy were:

- New opportunities for leadership: Europe has the leadership in many ICT application fields, such as embedded systems, and could further expand this position in other fields, such as telemedicine and ambient assisted living for the elderly.
- Underinvestment in ICT R&D&I: Private investment in ICT in Europe is less than half of that in the US. Moreover, pre-commercial procurement by the public services is heavily under-utilised.
- Barriers to ICT business growth: As successful ICT firms tend to grow faster outside of Europe, barriers to growth seem to pose a bigger problem than barriers to start a business.
- Fragmented ICT markets: Especially regarding regulation, standardisation and IP rights.
- Fragmented ICT R&D&I efforts: The usual problem of having separated ministries dealing with research, education and innovation.
- Complicated funding mechanisms: Surprisingly, the Commission acknowledges here that finding the right EU funding source for a given activity is complicated, especially in a dynamic field like ICT, where research, development and innovation are tightly interlinked.

To tackle these challenges, the Commission proposes the following measures:

- Doubling of ICT R&D investments within ten years, by matching the FP7 budget increase at Member State level, pre-commercial procurement and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), for example in the Future Internet.
- Prioritise and reduce fragmentation through the development of shared strategies and policies, pooling of resources in Joint Research Programmes (e.g. Ambient Assisted Living), sharing ICT infrastructures and making research careers more attractive. In addition, ICT Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) should be established in the framework of the new European Institute for Innovation and Technology (EIT).
- Facilitate the emergence of markets for innovation: ICT R&D&I policy must help drive forward other policies, like health, energy or transport policies. Moreover, standardisation and interoperability at European level should be achieved. With regard to standardisation, the EC will publish a White Paper on this subject in spring 2009.
- European-scale projects spanning from R&D to deployment, focussing for example on innovative ICT solutions for sustainable healthcare, energy efficiency and for electronic identity management (eID).
- Simplification and streamlining in order to cut the “red tape” and allow greater flexibility in R&D&I programmes (like FP7!).
- International cooperation to seek global partnerships; for this, Member States should jointly define priority areas.

The strategy ends by presenting a vision for the European ICT landscape in 2020, where ICT R&D investments have doubled, five additional world-class ICT poles have been created and new innovative ICT businesses have grown. This would then allow Europe’s ICT sector to supply at least the equivalent of its share of the market on a global scale.

The Commission’s new ICT strategy can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/tl/research/documents/ict-rdi-strategy.pdf

European Cluster Policy Group appointed

On 17 October, the European Commission published the Communication “Towards world-class clusters in the European Union” (see Synopsis 2008/9), which is one of the nine priorities of the broad-based EU innovation strategy adopted in 2006. One of the actions mentioned in the Communication was the setting up of a European Cluster Policy Group with the aim to explore how to better assist Member States in supporting the emergence of more world-class clusters in the EU. The members of this group have now been appointed.

On 19 and 20 March, 40 experts met at a workshop in Malmo, Sweden, to discuss the cluster issue. The workshop was jointly organised by Vinnova (The Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems) and the European Commission in preparation of the first meeting of the European Cluster Policy Group.

The presentations from the Cluster workshop in Malmo can be found here:

<http://www.europe-innova.org/index.jsp>

To find the text of the Communication from October 2008, please go to this link:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/innovation/doc/com_2008_652_en.pdf

For information on the European Cluster Observatory, go to this website:

<http://www.clusterobservatory.eu/>

Members of the European Cluster Policy Group can be found here:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:059:0007:0007:EN:PDF>

EIT launches its first call

On 2 April, the European Institute of Technology (EIT) has launched its first call in order to establish the first two or three Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) with a deadline until 27 August 2009. The budget the European Commission will raise until 2013 amounts to €270 million, whereas it has to be mentioned that only 25% of a KIC's financial support will be gotten in this way. The rest of the financial means will have to be acquired through public and private funds.

KICs aim at building partnerships between higher education institutes, research and the business actors, it is expected that successful KICs will be built along already established cooperation lines. Its objectives will be to establish new business areas for large and small and medium sized enterprises, as well as the creation of spin-offs. A special focus shall be put on education. The selection criteria are, therefore, very high; not only do applicants have to present a business plan with their submission, but also a strategy, of how they want to fulfil the EIT's educational aims.

For the first two or three KICs that will be chosen until 2010, the thematic focus will be put on climate change, sustainable energy supplies, as well as ICT.

More information on the EIT and the first call can be found here:

<http://eit.europa.eu/kics-call.html>

Publications

Consultation on effectiveness of innovation support

DG Enterprise and Industry opened an online public consultation to gain insights on how to best improve the effectiveness of public innovation support mechanisms in the EU. The consultation consist of two parts, one of them targeting companies, the other referring to innovation policy makers and those implementing innovation support instruments. The consultation aims at providing better understanding of the most appropriate way on how to split tasks between EU, national and regional level.

The results will be published in a Commission staff working document in June 2009. Moreover, the consultation will feed into the discussion on the future European Plan for Innovation, which was called for by the European Council in December 2008 and which is planned to be published at the end of 2009.

The consultation is open until 4 May 2009 and can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=2490

Expert workshop on the future European strategy to support service innovation

On 9 and 10 March, DG Enterprise and Industry in cooperation with TEKES, the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation organised a workshop on innovation in services in Porvoo, Finland. The aim of the workshop was to get inputs for the preparation of a European Strategy in support of innovation in services, which was announced in the Communication on the EU innovation strategy launched in 2006. About 40 experts took part in the workshop. DG Enterprise will most likely publish a Communication on service innovation this summer.

The presentations given in Porvoo can be found here:

<http://www.europe-innova.org/index.jsp?type=page&cid=11499&lg=en>

Directorate General Enterprise and Industry website updated

The European Commission has recently updated the website of DG Enterprise and Industry. The site is structured in a very user-friendly manner, allowing for the division between basic information on policy and industry involvement on the one hand, and on what is currently going on in Brussels. The site is also equipped with a questions and terms section that includes a glossary, FAQs and a search function. In addition, a multimedia portal provides the user with current video streaming and broadcasts on relevant issues. Last but not least, the Enterprise e-Services portal allows stakeholders to access all enterprise and industry-related e-services.

The updated website of DG Enterprise can be found here:

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

◆ Education

EU proposes to consolidate the dialogue between university and business

On 2 April, the European Commission (EC) tabled the Communication “A new partnership for the modernisation of universities: the EU Forum for University Business Dialogue”. This Communication proposes concrete measures to expand and consolidate the relation between higher education and business. As a follow-up of the Communication on “New skills for new jobs” from December 2008, the EC organised for the second time a forum bringing together university and business on 5-6 February (see Synopsis 2009/1). The current Communication is aiming at reinforcing the existing platform of exchange by organising plenary meetings and thematic seminars, complemented by a web space to share good practice and support continuing discussions. The involvement of national and regional authorities should also be strengthened while openness to actors from outside the EU has to be promoted.

These measures proposed in the Communication are part of other EC’s activities to support the Member States in their efforts to reform their higher education systems, following the 2006 Communication concerning the modernisation agenda for universities.

In addition, the Commission plans to analyse to which extend these partnerships between higher education and business could be supported through existing EU programmes. Possible future topics include the role of university-business cooperation for regional development and the involvement of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

The Communication “A new partnership for the modernisation of universities: the EU Forum for University Business Dialogue” can be downloaded under:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1261_en.htm

More information on the University-Business Forum can be found under:

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

Visibility of Universities of Applied Sciences to be reinforced

On 2 April, the European Network for Universities of Applied Sciences (UASNET) held a thematic evening reception presenting its activities as well as its position paper ‘Leuven 2020: Europe’s Knowledge Future’ concerning the development of the Bologna Process as input for discussion at the next Ministerial conference to be held in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium) at the end of April. The first results of UASNET main project (EDUPROF), published in a report on the research activities of Universities of Applied Sciences in Europe, were also presented.

Created in 2004 by eight European national associations of UAS, among them Switzerland, the network aims at showing what universities of applied sciences have to offer and at promoting collaboration:

- between individual universities of applied sciences (education),
- with the business sector, SMEs and the public sector (world of work), and
- with policy makers from national authorities, the European Commission, Parliament and the Council (policy).

As invited speaker, Mr. Robert-Jan Smits, Director at DG Research, mentioned that the EU programmes for research and education are expecting a wider participation of UAS and called the institutions to get more visibility on the international level.

More information about UASNET, its publication and its position paper regarding the Bologna Process are to be found under:

<http://www.uasnet.eu>

Public debate on the future of education

On 30 March, the second debate organised in relation with the European Year of Creativity and Innovation tackled the future of education. The series of Brussels Debates provides a platform for reflection and exchange of ideas and contributes to policy discussion on creativity and innovation. Ms. Odile Quintin, Director General for Education and Culture, raised the topic of the economic crisis and called for immediate and long term responses, also from the education side with constant or increasing investment for education and training. References were made to two of the latest Commission Communications: “New skills for new jobs” which promotes people to get the key competences for the new knowledge society and “University Business Dialogue” (p. 8).

For more information about the Brussels Debates during the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, please consult the following website:

http://create2009.europa.eu/index_en/debates.html

Publications

Useful database for projects funded by DG EAC programmes

The Education and Culture Directorate-General (DG EAC) has launched an electronic platform to give more visibility to its funded projects. The EVE platform (Espace Virtuel d’Echange) is meant to ease the access to the results and details of projects supported by the Lifelong Learning, Culture, Youth in Action and Citizenship programmes. The tool is available to project beneficiaries from 2009 but information about projects funded in the past has already been introduced in the platform. Thus, EVE already contains hundreds of projects funded under the 2000-2006 Education and Culture Programmes.

More concretely, the platform contains projects-related information, such as: learning materials, handbooks, manuals, CDs, etc.; projects’ websites, links to different databases; personal testimonials from project participants; documents and guidelines; associations and European partnerships. EVE will expand as the projects develop and the coordinators insert the results on the electronic platform.

The overarching objective of this initiative is to provide users with a centralized vision of the majority of education projects funded by the European Commission.

The information platform can be consulted under:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eve>

Impressions from the SwissCore Higher Education Seminar 2009

On 20 March, SwissCore organised an event focusing on the higher education priorities of the European Commission and of the Bologna Process. The seminar allowed Swiss higher education actors to get first-hand information on the latest European education policy developments. Those were, among others, the updated strategic framework concerning the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, addressed by the Commission in December 2008, as well as the relation between university and business on which the Commission had just released a new Communication on 2 April (p. 8). The SwissCore Higher Education Seminar gave the participants the opportunity to discuss and raise questions directly to the experts from the Commission, especially concerning the practicalities of a future association of Switzerland to the education and youth programmes and concerning the possible interaction on the policy level.

The programme and the presentations can be found on SwissCore's website:

http://www.swisscore.org/fs_events.htm



Impressions from the SwissCore Higher Education Seminar 2009. Top left: Vito Borrelli, European Commission; bottom right: Marie-Anne Persoons, Benelux Bologna Secretariat.

SwissCore Apéro

On 31 March, for the 17th time running, the SwissCore Apéro again offered the possibility to get to know other Swiss expats in Brussels. Welcoming at the SwissCore premises newly arrived people, ranging from students and trainees at the Commission to people working in the economics sector, SwissCore and the Mission of Switzerland to the EU presented their activities. SwissCore was happy to see that among the 24 guests, there were also some known faces that were already more established in Brussels. This in turn, offered a nice opportunity to build new networks among participants.