

SwissCore Synopsis

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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

Electoral springtime

As the trees get greener and the flowers are blooming, the electoral campaigns for the European Parliament are taking off and Brussels' walls are covered with the faces of the candidates from Belgium. The EU institutions are preparing themselves for a new Parliament in July and a new Commission, hopefully in November, but maybe only at the beginning of 2010. In all this electoral fever, the partial replacement of the Scientific Council of the European Research Council (ERC) got somewhat forgotten, even more so as a group of experts are currently reviewing this new institution. The announcement of the appointment of three new members therefore came somewhat as a surprise (p. 2). Moreover, the ERC Executive Agency is busy recruiting its staff, in order to be ready for 15 July, when should be fully operational and independent.

Following the lead of the expert group who evaluated FP6 (see Synopsis 2009/2), the European Commission published two back-to-back Communications which detail its plans for the interim review of FP7 and take stock of the two first years of activity of this programme (p. 3), while also answering the suggestions made by the same expert group on future Framework Programmes (p. 5). This interim evaluation and possible changes to the programme will certainly be one of the most important topics in the field of research for the new Parliament next year.

In the framework of the first European SME week (6-14 May) some key events are currently taking place in Brussels, for instance the European Entrepreneurship Video Award with Swiss film producer and Oscar winner Marco Müller as one of the jury members (p. 9). The European SME week is a campaign to promote entrepreneurship across Europe and to inform entrepreneurs about support available for them at European, national and local level. The week is part of the Small Business Act (SBA), the first SME policy framework for the EU and its Member States that aims at disburdening in a comprehensive way SMEs. However, some European business organisations doubt on the effectiveness of SME policy actions undertaken by the European Commission so far (p. 7).

Concerning education, the Bologna Ministerial Conference that was held in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve at the end of April centralised the majority of the discussions concerning the future of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (p. 10).

◆ Research

7th Framework Programme (FP7)

New members appointed to the ERC Scientific Council

On 27 April, the European Commission appointed three new Members of the ERC Scientific Council:

- Prof. Sierd A.P.L. Cloetingh (NL), an Earth scientist at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- Prof. Carlos M. Duarte (ES), an ecologist from the Spanish Council for Scientific Research (CSIC);
- Prof. Henrietta L. Moore (UK), a social anthropologist from the University of Cambridge.

These three new members replace the three retiring founding members of the Scientific Council, Prof. Manuel Castells (sociology, ES), Prof. Paul J. Crutzen (atmospheric physics, NL) and Prof. Lord May of Oxford (ecology, UK). The new members are appointed for a period of four years. As a reminder, the current members of the Scientific Council also have a four-year term, renewable once (see Commission Decision 2007/134/EC of 02.02.2007 on the establishment of the ERC).

While we appreciate that the European Commission has taken into consideration the scientific field distribution within the Scientific Council (the new members come from the same or at least similar field than the resigning members), we acknowledge with some concern that the

nationalities of the resigning and new members also seem to coincide. It would be contrary to the basic idea of the ERC Scientific Council if nationals of a certain country would have to be systematically replaced with scientists from the same country.

The biographies of the new members of the ERC Scientific Council can be found under:

<http://erc.europa.eu/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.display&topicID=172>

The Commission looks back on the first two years and into the future of FP7

On 29 April, the European Commission published a Communication on the progress made under FP7 in 2007 and 2008. This Communication fulfils a legal obligation of the FP7 Decision of 2006 and provides a basis for the interim evaluation of the programme in 2010. It provides the following facts about FP7:

- Nearly 36'000 proposals have been received by the Commission services, of which 5500 were selected for funding.
- Of those, 11'000 proposals were received by the European Research Council, which funded over 500 projects so far.
- The quality of the evaluations was judged similar or better than national evaluations by 91% of the evaluators.
- Five Joint Technology Initiatives, two Art. 169 initiatives and two Executive Agencies have been set up.
- The Risk-Sharing Finance Facility (RSFF) has supported loans for over €2 billion.
- Several simplifications have been introduced (e.g. Guarantee Fund, Unique Registration Facility) and the number of audit certificates and ex-ante checks have been reduced tenfold compared to FP6.

In addition to these impressive results, the Communication also lists a couple of issues that need to be addressed:

- SME participation is around 11%, which is still below the 15% target;
- The below average participation of most new Member States.

Moreover, regarding simplification, the Commission concedes that more efforts are still needed. In a section dedicated to this issue, a few interesting thoughts are listed, as the fact that more radical simplification of FP7 would require a change of the Community Financial Regulations applying to the Framework Programmes. This would entail an agreement between EU institutions on a proper balance between accountability and risk-taking (see also Dossier below). In an annex to the Communication, the European Research Advisory Board (ERAB) calls for a risk-tolerant and trust-based approach in research funding. The Commission foresees to put forward a detailed tolerable risk analysis for the research policy area, as well as a Communication to reflect on this issue in 2010.

In the last part of the document, the Commission announces that an independent expert group, whose mandate would be adopted in autumn 2009, would undertake the interim evaluation of FP7 that would be completed in the second half of 2010.

The interim report on FP7 can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/reports/2009/pdf/fp7-progress-report-communication-270409_en.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none

Frequently Asked Questions on the progress made under FP7:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/09/209&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Dossier: Audits and other financial matters in the Framework Programme

Since the beginning of FP7, the European Commission's DG Research has streamlined some of the financial and administrative requirements in grant agreements, for example, the standard reporting period was increased from 12 to 18 months, in order to diminish the number of reports by 50%. Moreover, the number of audit certificates has also been decreased, by setting a minimal amount over which a certificate is needed, and through the introduction of so-called "certificates on the methodology". The basic idea there is that instead of having to submit individual cost certificates, the methodology the beneficiary uses to calculate ("allocate") its costs is being checked by auditors, thus foregoing the need for interim audit certificates.

Besides those simplifications that directly affect the beneficiaries, the Commission has also changed the way audit certificates should be prepared: while before, auditors were asked to give a so-called “assurance” that the books of the beneficiary were correct, they are now asked to base their audit certificate on “factual findings”. This means the auditor, or the certified public officer, has to answer a series of detailed questions on a form provided by the Commission together with the grant agreement (Form D). The Commission will then check the answers to these questions before accepting the certificate. According to the Commission, this change should have the effect of standardising the audit certificates and allow better cost control.

Less ex-ante checks, more ex-post controls

It seems paradoxical that the Commission provides simplifications on one side, and wants tighter control on the other – as always, the reason is a political one: while simplification of the Framework Programme (FP) was one of the key issues for all EU institutions in the preparation of FP7, at the same time the European Court of Auditors and the European Parliament’s Budget Committee asked for better control of the beneficiaries. The Commission therefore had to do the difficult exercise of juggling with simplification and control in the implementation of the Framework Programme. Research Director-General Silva Rodriguez summarised this in front of the Research Committee of the Parliament once as “less ex-ante checks, more ex-post controls”. This means that while beneficiaries will have to provide less evidence during the project’s running time, the chance of being audited by the Commission would increase.

This also led to a change in the way of ex-post auditing: while before projects used to be audited, the Commission now focuses on auditing participants (beneficiaries). As these *ex-post* audits are always at least one FP behind, this rule now mostly applies to FP6 projects. The Commission noted that of the 12’000 FP participants, the 50 ‘biggest’ ones receive 40% of the FP budget; by tightly controlling these 50 participants, the Commission can ‘secure’ 40% of the money paid out.

Errors will be corrected

What happens if the auditors of the Commission find errors in the participant’s accounts of an FP project? Other projects will be checked, in order to detect if such an error is fortuitous or systemic. Such systemic errors are mostly observed with personnel costs and overheads. These errors will most likely affect all FP accounts of a beneficiary and can thus represent a considerable amount of money, especially for big participants. The Commission services will then extrapolate the extent of the error on all projects that are currently running or that have been finalised within the last 5 years, and issue a recovery order based on the sum of this extrapolation. This can thus lead to large payments by beneficiaries and should not be lightly taken.

Low risk tolerance as a hindrance for simplification

Currently, the main problem lays not so much with such practices, but with the level of error that is deemed to be acceptable. Errors happen all the time, so it is important to determine from what level onwards they need to be corrected. A ruling of the European Court of Auditors and DG Budget has fixed this error tolerance at 2%, a level that many experts judge to be too stringent. While seemingly benign, this limit has many implications on the financial administration of the FP, not only at the level of audits. For example, the Commission is currently considering dropping the Certificate on the Methodology for Average personnel costs (CoMAv), as methodologies with less than 2% deviation from real costs demand as much effort as defining the effective costs. As a result, one of the planned simplifications of FP7 (average personnel costs) might never find use due to this low error tolerance. This has led the Commission to suggest a re-examination of this error limit, in order to be able to introduce more simplifications and reduce the costs of controls (see link to Communication below). This debate will also feed into the interim revision of FP7, planned in 2010 (see p. 2).

Information on the auditing policy of DG Research can be found under:

http://cordis.europa.eu/audit-certification/home_en.html

The change in auditing policy is detailed under:

<ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp6/docs/awareness-leaflet-2007.pdf>

The Commission’s Communication on the concept of tolerable risk of error can be found under:

EU Research Policy

FP6 ex-post evaluation: the response of the European Commission

In the February issue of our Synopsis (see 2009/2), we had reported about the ex-post evaluation of FP6 performed by a group of independent experts led by Prof. Rietschel. Their report, besides analysing FP6, also made concrete recommendations for future Framework Programmes (FP). The findings and suggestions of this expert group are now answered by the European Commission in a Communication that came out on 29 April, together with the FP7 progress report (see p. 2).

In the opening statement, the Commission underlines the quality of the expert's report, acknowledging that it "has set a benchmark in terms of range and quality of evidence used and the level of detail provided". In general, all ten recommendations of the experts were well received, but sometimes also contradicted:

- The Commission does not agree with the experts' view of a monopolistic position of the FP in European research, citing CERN, EUREKA, ESF and COST in this context. The fact that the budgets of these organisations are nowadays in no way comparable to that of the Framework Programme is not mentioned, though.
- While the suggestion of a NEST-like instrument is well received, the Commission regards it more as a "complement" rather than a part of the ERC, as suggested by the experts.
- Acknowledging the issue of SME participation, the Commission mentions a detailed study that is underway in order to "explore the benefits which SMEs gain from FP participation". In this context, the different needs of high, medium and low-tech SMEs are recognised.
- Regarding the touchy issue of gender balance, it is boldly stated that the "proportion of women in the FP is already higher than overall in national programmes and there are limits to what the FP can achieve on its own". This is a clear call towards national Research Funding Agencies and is likely to provoke some reactions...
- Regarding the point of administrative simplification, the Commission is placing the ball in the court of "the legislator, the budgetary authority and the Court of Auditor to change the overall legal, financial and control framework". While it is true that the Commission has to work with these constraints, a lot of issues do happen at the level of the interpretation and implementation of the rules and regulations. And at this level, DG Research has its own homework to do... A Communication on simplification is foreseen in 2010, which should serve as a basis for further discussions on this issue (see also the article on the FP7 progress report on p. 2).

With the present Communication, which also includes a response to the King report on the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the Commission sets the basis for a dialogue on the future of the FPs in general, and on the review of FP7 and the design of FP8 in particular. We look forward to the work of the expert group which will be in charge of the FP7 interim evaluation, and hope that their report will be of comparable quality than the FP6 ex-post evaluation.

The Commission's response to the FP6 ex-post evaluation can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/reports/2009/pdf/fp6_evaluation_response_en.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none

Animal or research protection Directive?

On 5 May, the EP published its first reading of the Directive on the 'protection of animals used for scientific purposes'. This revision (86/609/EEC) had been necessary in order to provide a level playing field throughout Europe for industry and the research community as well as to strengthen the protection of animals still used in scientific procedures. The review has been subject to criticism and controversy mainly on the below mentioned articles. The European scientific community primarily fears to lose its competitiveness due to restrictions when carrying out research experiments. The amendments introduced by the EP to the legal text are the following:

- Article 2 now includes live non-human vertebrate animals, including independently feeding larval forms and embryonic or foetal forms of species of mammals only, so as to reduce bureaucracy.

- Article 8 no longer states that experiments with non-human primates are only permitted when the object is the avoidance, prevention, diagnosis or treatment of life-threatening or debilitating clinical conditions in human beings, thus allowing researchers to remain competitive. In order to measure the impact of the directive and in particular this article, the European Commission will carry out a review on the use of non-human primates in procedures every two years.
- Article 15 included the definitions of severity banding was seen as critical because such definitions would directly influence other articles, like, i.e. article 16 on the reuse. The definitions can now be found in a newly proposed Annex VIIa, which, i) gives clear definitions and ii) ensures that Europe stays an attractive environment to carry out research.
- Article 16 on the restriction of reuse of animals was dreaded to have rather adverse affects and actually increase the number of animals used in research, as it stated that an animal could only be reused once. After the first reading by the EP the article now states that reuse is possible when previous procedures performed on the animal were classified as 'up to moderate' and when further procedure is either 'up to moderate' as well, or 'non-recovery'.
- Article 32 was feared to make it impossible for farms or zoos to continue their usual care and accommodation practices, now states that for justified scientific reasons, veterinary reasons or animal welfare reasons, Member States may allow exemptions. Moreover, an additional new paragraph allows animal species of agricultural interest to be housed according to current agricultural practices of the Member States; Annex IVa defines those species.

It has to be kept in mind that this version of the revision still awaits the first reading by the Council and that, whatever the outcome, it will have little legal consequences for Switzerland as the European legislation is normally not applicable. It might therefore only indirectly affect Swiss researchers that work in pan-European consortia.

The procedure file can be downloaded here:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/file.jsp?id=5713682>

Publications

Social Science and Humanities policy reviews

Two new policy reviews in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) have lately been published. One review focuses on youth and its role in Europe, the other on migration in Europe, both tackle the problems from a policy oriented point of view.

The policy review on 'European Research on Youth – Supporting young people to participate fully in society – The contribution of European Research' examines the results of all in all 25 youth related projects under the framework programmes 4 to 7. The aim is to provide policy makers with concrete recommendations for further work, where the focus lies on the transition phase between education and work, as well as on strategies for social inclusion and on the full participation of young people as citizens of society. One of the major recommendations is to include young people in the process of policy making rather than making it for them. Moreover, the review states that the relation of young people with society these days depends on education and training, on health and housing policies and on finance and social welfare. Finally, the report states that models from other countries have to be well examined and that cultural, historical and social contexts have to be taken into consideration before they can be applied.

The second policy review focuses on migration: 'Moving Europe – EU research on migration and policy needs'. The report names demography, migration, integration and social cohesion as major concerns of the European Union, whereas one has to consider that a topic such as migration always has to be approached in a multidisciplinary way. The review, considering some 50 research projects, concludes on the following emerging topics: transnationalism, changing meaning of borders, illegal migration (under-documented migration), feminisation of migration, circular migration and integration in all its social, economic, political and legal sense. The report points out that policy makers should show foresight and anticipation and take well-informed decisions, the report points out. Finally, it is suggested that, whenever possible, the perspectives and insights of migrants should be included in framing research questions and methodologies.

Both reviews can be downloaded under the following link:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/policy-briefs-reviews_en.html

Dedicated website for industrial partners in Marie Curie actions

PeopleNetwork is the name of a new European website to promote transnational as well as inter-sectoral mobility in research through the Marie Curie actions. User-friendly information and services are provided for industrial partners for actions increasing research between universities and companies such as Industry-Academia Partnerships and Pathways (IAPP) and Initial Training Network (ITN).

IAPP fosters partnerships between public research organisations and private commercial enterprises, in particular SMEs, enhancing knowledge sharing and bringing the different cultures closer together. ITN aims at improving early-stage researchers' career prospects in both public and private sectors through joint research training programmes.

The website PeopleNetwork provides current information about calls, as well as step-by-step advices on how to participate in such calls. The current call for IAPP that opened on 24 April and will close on 27 July 2009 is announced on this website. These new services were set up thanks to a National Contact Point project.

Link to the website: <http://www.fp7peoplenetwork.eu/>

Information about the IAPP call is available on the Cordis or Marie Curie website:

<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm?fuseaction=UserSite.FP7CallsPage>

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

The European Research Area Partnership – 2008 Initiatives

Under this title, the European Commission has bundled all their ERA (European Research Area) Initiatives and the corresponding Council Conclusions. The main value of this publication, besides its more appealing format than the usual official documents, is to group all these Communications and Conclusions in one single booklet. This confers it the value of a “ERA Handbook”, which can be used for reference in a practical way. It will therefore come handy to all research policy makers regularly dealing with the conception and implementation of the ERA

The publication on the 2008 ERA Initiatives can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/era-partnership-2008-initiatives_en.pdf

◆ Innovation

First European SME week shines a light on entrepreneurship in difficult times

With more than 1'000 events in 35 countries, the first European SME week (6-14 May) promotes business in Europe and informs entrepreneurs about the support available to them at European, national and local level. The action implemented as a part of the Small Business Act (see Synopsis 2008/5) aims also at convincing young people that business might be an interesting career opportunity to them. For this purpose, the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs exchange programme was launched at the beginning of 2009 (see Synopsis 2009/2). Coordinated by DG Enterprise and Industry, most of the events and activities of the European SME week are organised in participating countries by businesses, support bodies and local or regional authorities. However, some of the events will take place in Brussels. For example in the interactive exhibition “SME experience How it feels to be an entrepreneur”, visitors will get first hand experience of what it is like to be an entrepreneur. At the opening event of the European SME week on 6 May, the winners of the European Entrepreneurship Video Awards were announced (see article below). The SME week will conclude with a conference focusing on the reduction of administrative burdens on business, taking place in Prague on 14 May.

Despite all those efforts made by the Commission, business organisations are worried about the implementation of the Small Business Act (SBA), criticising that there is a wide gap between SME policy actions and concrete effects on small businesses. A survey done by UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers organisation, concludes that Member States do better on support to internationalisation and innovation as well as on state aid than the European Commission.

More information on the SME week as well as on the survey of UEAPME can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/entrepreneurship/sme-week/index_en.htm

<http://www.ueapme.com/spip.php?rubrique113>

Swiss honoured as 2009 European Inventor of the Year for cancer treatment

Two major concerns of citizens – health and environment – were the big winners when the European Commission and the European Patent Office (EPO) presented the 2009 European Inventor of the Year awards in Prague on 28 April. In the presence of Czech President Vaclav Klaus four inventions selected by an international jury in the following four categories were honoured: Industry, SME/Research, Non-European countries, and Lifetime achievement.

Fortunately, the prize in the category “Industry” went to Swiss medical chemist Jürg Zimmermann, who shares the prize with American oncologist Brian Druker. They were honoured for the invention of an effective drug to combat chronic myelogenous leukaemia (CML), providing unprecedented rates of recovery. Thanks to this drug, marketed as Glivec by Swiss based pharmaceutical company Novartis, it seems likely that further achievements in the cure for cancer may be found.

The other prizes were related to malaria drug based on a herbal agent, the achievements in the commercial use of solar energy and a highly efficient heat exchanger.

For more information go to the website of the European Patent Office:

<http://www.epo.org/about-us/events/epf2009/inventor.html>

Has design to be included in the EU innovation policy?

Directorate General Enterprise and Industry (DG ENTR) drafted a staff working document on design as a driver of user-centred innovation. The document, published on 7 April, provides an analysis of the rationale for making design an integral part of the European innovation policy. According to the document design has to be considered as an important non-technological driver of innovation and competitiveness. Companies that invest in design tend to be more innovative, more profitable and grow faster than those who do not. The Commission argues that design as an innovation driver is less capital intensive and has shorter pay-back periods than for example technological research, which could be an advantage in the current time of economic downturn where money is tight and results need to be achieved quickly. The document points out that innovation policy and support, as well as education systems, have not yet caught up with the increasing meaning of design for innovation and competitiveness.

In a public consultation which will close on 26 June, the Commission wants to find out whether more has to be done at EU level in the area of design.

The staff working document can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/document.cfm?action=display&doc_id=2784&userservice_id=1&request.id=0

The questionnaires of the public consultation on design as driver of innovation, either the version for individuals or for organisations, can be downloaded here:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=3054&tpa_id=135&lang=en

Commission wants to create a Unified Patent Litigation System

For European businesses the current patent litigation system is complex, slow and costly, mainly because it lacks a unified patent court. In order to remove this obstacle to innovation and growth, Member State experts and interested parties have been discussing since 2007 the idea of creating a Unified Patent Litigation System (UPLS), which was first suggested in a Commission

Communication adopted on 3 April 2007 (see Synopsis 2007/3). The court structure to be established would have jurisdiction concerning the infringement and validity of European and Community patents. Such a unified patent litigation system would make patent litigations faster, less expensive and more predictable. A recent cost-benefit analysis came to the conclusion that there would be a substantial financial benefit of cost savings between € 148 and € 289 million per year.

The Commission is currently seeking authorization from EU Member States to conclude an agreement on a unified patent litigation system. For this, the Commission adopted a Recommendation to the Council that would provide the Commission with negotiating directives for the conclusion of an agreement creating such a system. The UPLS should be created by the conclusion of an agreement involving the Community, its Member States and other contracting States of the European Patent Convention (EPC), Switzerland being one of them.

The Recommendation as well as the cost-benefit analysis can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/indprop/patent/index_en.htm

Publications

Rolling the cameras on entrepreneurship

Part of the first European SME week, the European Entrepreneurship Video Awards were announced in Brussels on 6 May. Nine videos in three different categories were awarded by an international jury. In this video competition, the European Commission asked for short but creative, interesting and enlightening videos about entrepreneurship in three categories: “The entrepreneurial spirit”, “Innovative entrepreneurship” and “Responsible Entrepreneurship”. The videos aim at encouraging people to start their own business.

If you want to watch the videos go to the web site of the SME Week channel:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/entrepreneurship/sme-week/channel/index_en.htm

◆ Education

More mobility through the Bologna Process

On 28-29 April, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the 46 European members of the Bologna Process met in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in order to take stock of the first ten years and to set priorities of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for the next decade. For the first time, the conference was open to foreign countries as invited guests, such as Canada, Australia, China and Brazil.

As a result of the discussions, the official communiqué of the conference confirms the validity of the objectives set by the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and of relating policies, underlining the importance of further commitment for their implementation. Indeed not all goals have been achieved in terms of mobility, training and harmonization of certification.

Listing the priorities for the future, the communiqué puts social dimension of higher education, lifelong learning and employability at the top. It points out how important it is to make career development of early stage researchers more attractive. Mobility will have to play an even more important role, in terms of quality and quantity: As target, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad in 2020. In comparison, Switzerland counts currently 13% of mobile students.

Following the communiqué, the multidimensional ranking system proposed lately by the European Commission (see Synopsis 2008/10) should “be developed in close consultation with the key stakeholders” and can be read as a critical statement against a too strong steering of the Commission. The participants expressed the importance of maintaining the existing stakeholder approach post 2010, in which universities, students, business, in tandem with governments, share responsibility for the development of future reforms and cooperation.

The Bologna anniversary conference to mark the official launch of the EHEA and the end of the first phase of the process will be held in Vienna and Budapest on 11-12 March 2010, while the next regular Ministerial conference will take place in Bucharest, Romania on 27-28 April 2012.

Link to the Conference website and the communiqué:

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/index.htm>

EU youth policy is advancing

On 27 April, the European Commission has adopted its first ever youth strategy entitled ‘Youth – Investing and Empowering’, where it sets the framework for the next decade of youth policy. On the very same day the EC published a youth report as well (see article on SSH policy reviews; p. 6) which is a compilation of data from youth programmes and projects and which also presents recommendations to policy makers.

The communication underlines that young people have to deal with many challenges in today’s globalised world and that in the eye of the current financial crisis they are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and a valuable and dwindling resource. Therefore, the strategy focuses on key policy areas such as youth education, employment, creativity, and entrepreneurship, social inclusion, health and sport, civic participation, and volunteering. The goals of the strategy are:

- to create more opportunities for youth in education and employment
- to improve access and full participation of all young people in society
- to foster solidarity between youth and society.

The implementation of the strategy is mostly laid into the hands of Member States, reporting will be expected every three years and funds will be obtained through already existing programmes at national and international level, such as Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs and Lifelong Learning Programmes.

The full communication can be downloaded here:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0200:FIN:EN:PDF>

More information on youth policy can be found under:

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

Publications

Many reports as basis for discussion at the Bologna Conference

On the occasion of the Bologna Ministerial conference, manifold reports were published and submitted to the Education Ministers. The Eurydice information network on education published the report “Higher Education in Europe 2009: Developments in the Bologna Process”. It focuses on topics like the Bachelor-Master degree structure, the European credit transfer system (ECTS), diploma supplement, national qualifications frameworks and mobility and portability of financial support. The report states that substantial progress has been made in all these areas as result of the Bologna Process.

Eurostat, the Statistics Office of the European Communities, published the report “The Bologna Process in higher education in Europe – Key indicators on the social dimension and mobility”. Based on an analysis of 18 selected indicators, this report looks into access, study framework conditions and mobility in higher education as well as the employability of graduates. It covers all 46 countries participating in the Bologna Process and includes comparisons with other countries in the world, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan and the United States.

Position papers on the current and future developments of the Bologna Process were also delivered by different associations active in higher education such as the European students’ union, the European University Association (EUA), the Coimbra Group and the Council of Europe.

All reports and positions papers submitted to the Bologna Conference’s ministers are available under: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents.htm>

Positions papers concerning the future beyond 2010 can be found under:

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/actionlines/Beyond2010.htm>

Call for National and European Qualifications Frameworks (NQF-EQF)

On 29 April, the Commission launched a call for proposals in order to award grants for actions to develop and implement the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), including national and setoral qualifications frameworks. Approximately 6-8 proposals with the maximum number of countries and sectors will be funded under this call in order to help organising actions that should contribute to a successful and enduring implementation of the EQF. The projects to be funded should support:

- the development, promotion and application of the learning outcomes approach for all qualifications at all levels,
- the development and implementation of overarching National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) based on learning outcomes at all levels,
- the referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF.

The call is open to consortia of European, national, regional and sectoral organisations. Grants will amount to between €200'000 and €300'000 per project. Applications must be submitted until 14 August 2009. As a non-associated country, Switzerland could joint a consortium of eligible participants.

Detailed information concerning the conditions for submission can be found under:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/funding/2009/call_eqf_2009.html

Eurobarometer survey on higher education

The Eurobarometer survey on higher education in Europe, published in March 2009, requested by DG Education and Culture and coordinated by DG Communication, investigated into the target population of higher education students in 31 countries: the 27 EU Member States, Croatia, Iceland, Norway and Turkey. The objective was to find out students' opinions about access and equity in higher education systems, the purposes of higher education, the quality and transparency in higher education institutions, the students' opinions about studying abroad, the cooperation of universities with business and the development of an entrepreneurial mindset and about post-graduate plans of Bachelor or Master students. On the whole, the results point in the direction of an opening up of universities towards the world of business and life long learning as well as a wider access to higher education for all students. Moreover, strong support was given to the idea of programmes that were preparing students for the demands of today's workplace and that the main purpose of higher education should be to provide students with the knowledge and skills to be employable. Additionally, students felt that quality assessment of and the quality attributed to a higher education institution were important tools to help them decide where to study. With regard to mobility, students felt that the biggest obstacle to studying abroad was a lack of funding. Concerning post-graduate plans, Bachelor students often wanted to continue their career in academia, whereas 42% of Master students planned to continue their studies after graduation, 44% did not have this intention and 14% were still indecisive. All in all the survey shows that students generally seem satisfied but also that there remains still work to do in the field of curricular, governance and funding reforms set by the modernisation agenda for universities.

The full study can be downloaded here:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/studies/barometer_en.pdf

SwissCore Annual Event 2009

On 12 May, SwissCore will host its 14th Annual Event, a reception to thank its Brussels colleagues and contacts for their good collaboration in the past years. This year's host is Hans Ulrich Stöckling, President of the Foundation Council of the Swiss National Science Foundation. Some inputs will be given in the context of the current discussion concerning the funding system of universities. More than 100 participants are expected from the European Commission, IGLO and other research, innovation and education organisations in Brussels.

The new face of the SwissCore website

On 4 May SwissCore has launched its new website. Not only have the contents been updated, restructured and extended, they also cover a wider range of topics. The focus still lies on research, innovation and education issues in Brussels, but Swiss contextual information with many links to the Swiss actors have also been included. Moreover, the interested reader can now subscribe to the Synopsis directly on the homepage and has the possibility to go through the Synopsis archive. Another new feature has been added in the form of access to presentations given at SwissCore events. All in all, the new design is more reader friendly, very well structured and also an appeal to the eye.