

SwissCore Synopsis

September 2009

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◆ Seen from Brussels

Tackling the future of research policy after a warm summer

As temperatures start dropping again and people have returned from their holidays, research and innovation policy are back on the agenda of the increasing number of meetings and conferences in Brussels. In a marathon of mini-seminars and high-level conferences, the Swedish Presidency is currently drafting the future strategy of the European Research Area after 2010. Instead of mourning the non-achievement of the Lisbon goals, the Swedes were haranguing the troops behind the motto “bolder, better, bigger” at the past Competitiveness Council of 24-25 September. While the need to establish research priorities at EU level (Grand Challenges) and pool resources across Member States (Joint Programming) was recognised, the way to measure R&D targets (in absolute terms or as percentage of GDP) was an issue of discussion; the definition of concrete targets is foreseen at the next meeting.

The future (not just for research) looks brighter since the Irish “Yes” of last Friday; however, not all hurdles seem to be out of the way for the Lisbon Treaty. While the Polish President has declared ready to sign the Treaty in view of the outcome of the Irish referendum, the Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic is now examining a complaint filed by EU sceptics, and the Czech President is gladly awaiting the verdict before giving his avail.

On the side of the European Commission, its newly appointed President seems to be pondering as well on how the research, innovation and education portfolios should be distributed in his future team; a starch believer in the “knowledge triangle”, Barroso could be tempted to bring the three corners under one hat, something that many national ministries have so far failed to achieve. Moreover, considering the increased importance of research policy under the Lisbon Treaty, he is allegedly considering to reorganise the scattered scientific advice bodies set up by the Commission. One radical proposal in this context includes the creation of a “Chief Scientific Advisor”, whose competences are not well defined at this stage.

This whole reflexion is in line with efforts to streamline the innovation policy of the EU, as set forth in a recent Commission Communication (p. 5). This document proposes the publication next spring of an EU Innovation Act addressing the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy. This could also coincide with a major reorganisation of research, innovation and even education policy at the Commission. It is even rumoured that the Commission President himself could take over the innovation portfolio.

Regarding education, the European Commission submitted to the Council at the beginning of September a proposal for an agreement with Switzerland for its participation in the EU programmes “Lifelong Learning Programme” and “Youth in Action”. By signing this agreement, Switzerland will take part in the European Education and Youth programmes alongside the Member States of the EU, the European Economic Area and the Candidate Countries. Under the proposed terms, Switzerland could participate from 2011 onwards not only in all programmes for higher education but also for adults and children, such as the programme for student mobility in secondary education, newly introduced by the European Commission (see p. 8).

With all the activity going on in these three policy fields, we are certainly in for an eventful autumn and an even more exciting spring.

◆ Research

7th Framework Programme (FP7)

New prestigious ERC Starting Grants for Europe

Beginning of September, the European Research Council (ERC) published the results of the second call for Starting Grants (StG). 237 proposals were selected for a grant out of 2503 submissions with an estimated total budget of €325 million. This represents a success rate of around 10%, which is a major improvement compared to the first StG Call which had a success

rate of only 3.3% (299 grants out of 9167 proposals; see Synopsis 2008/1). The grantees are of 33 nationalities and will be working in host institutions in 19 different countries. The average age of the grantees is 36 years ranging from 31 to 45 years old. Around 23% are women.

The distribution of the selected proposals among the scientific domains stays similar to the first StG Call with a slight progression for Social Sciences & Humanities. The three lists per domain published by the Commission show, in alphabetical order, the 219 confirmed proposals selected for funding so far. These will be funded under the call budget originally announced. More funds are expected to become available, allowing additional grants to be offered. The lists will subsequently be updated. Proposals placed on the reserve list will only be published once their actual funding has been confirmed.

Following the indicative statistics, 17 grants will be performed at Swiss institutions. Currently only 16 beneficiaries are to be found in the above mentioned lists per domain (8 LS, 7 PSE, 1 SSH). Extra grants for Switzerland, still on the reserve list, might be added in the coming weeks. As for the first Starting Grant call, Swiss institutions are attracting many non-national researchers.

The three lists per domain can be found following the given links:

- for Life Sciences: http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/StG-2_List_LS.pdf
- for Physical Sciences and Engineering: http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/StG-2_List_PE.pdf
- for Social Sciences and Humanities: http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/StG-2_List_SH.pdf

Statistics as well as the press release can be found on the ERC website:

http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/Press_release_StG-2_results.pdf

http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/statistics_STG-2_outcome.pdf

Guide on research cooperation with Third Countries under FP7

In order to provide clear and efficient information to FP7 participants, the European Commission has for the first time prepared a small guide addressing the specific issue of research cooperation with Third Countries.

In general, Third Country participation is always possible and it is sometimes even mandatory or recommended (see relevant Work Programme and call text). Third Country participants need to be natural or legal persons created under national law of their place of establishments and they must sign the Grant Agreement with the European Commission. Third Country contribution to a proposal must be submitted in the same language as the entire proposal. Third Country participants can also use the Unique Registration Facility (URF), for which all documents have to be sent in their original version and their English translation if it is not an official EU language.

A distinction is made between International Cooperation Partner Countries (ICPC) and high-income countries (in particular the United States, Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand). It must be reminded that overseas countries and territories (OCT) have exactly the same status as the Member State to which they are linked.

Legal entities from ICPCs can participate in all FP7 activities and are eligible to receive funding. They may be coordinator of an indirect research action, but it has to be carefully justified. They enjoy similar rights and have the same obligations as the other EU partners. However, for certain points, special conditions can also be agreed upon, such as using a flat rate or lump-sum funding instead of reimbursement of actual costs.

Legal entities from high-income countries can participate in FP7 activities, they enjoy similar rights and are subject to the same obligations, but they can usually not receive an EC financial contribution, except under specific conditions listed in the guide. Even if they do not receive an EC funding, they must be involved in the grant agreement as of the beginning of the project.

The guide “Cooperation with Third Country Participants in an EC funded FP7 multi-partner research project” can be found under:

ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/guideline-third-country-participants_en.pdf

Updated guidance notes on FP7 Cost Certification

On 3 September, DG Research of the European Commission published an updated version of the “Guidance notes for beneficiaries and auditors” regarding the cost certificates issued by external auditors. Next to some rewording as well as additional information in the FAQ section, the main novelties include:

- The new criteria regarding the acceptability for average personnel cost methodologies: by Commission decision of 23 June 2009, the acceptable difference between the average rate and the extremes in each personnel category has been raised to a maximum of 25% for large participants (see Guide for details).
- Average personnel cost methodologies for physical persons and SME owners who do not receive a salary.

The updated version of “Certificates issued by external auditors - guidance notes for beneficiaries and auditors” can be found under: ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/guidelines-audit-certification_en.pdf

EU Research Policy

The Scientific Council’s response to the ERC review report

On 25 August, the Scientific Council of the European Research Council (ERC) sent its response to the chair of the review panel that had scrutinised the ERC earlier this year and had tabled its report on 23 July (see Synopsis 2009/7). Published on the ERC website in September, this response does not represent the official answer of the European Commission to the expert’s report, as clearly stated on the cover page. As a matter of fact, the Commission is due to present a formal response to the European Parliament and the Council in October only. It therefore seems that the Scientific Council wishes to emphasise its independence from the Commission by publishing on its own account a reply to the expert report.

In general, the Scientific Council welcomes the general orientation of the review and agrees with all of the recommendations published in the report. The response, albeit succinct, transpires some of the frustration the members of this independent body of scientists experienced when faced with the complex administrative rules that govern the work of Commission. Their major wish is therefore that the ERC becomes as quickly as possible truly independent; they see a structure under Art. 171 of the EU Treaty as the most obvious panacea to this issue. With a somewhat envious look on the EIT, the Scientific Council wishes to put the option of switching to such a structure on the agenda in an unconditional way. As a reminder, the review panel had proposed to revisit the question of the legal structure within two years and consider the Art. 171 option only in case of perceived failure to fulfil the other recommendations set forth in the report.

While not adding much new material to the general discussion on the future of the ERC, the response of the Scientific Council will nevertheless put in a different light the formal opinion of the Commission, which is eagerly expected by all the stakeholders of the ERC. We hope that the current Research Commissioner, who took the risk of establishing the ERC as an independent pan-European funding body, will still be able to determine the Commission’s position and thus shape the future of the ERC.

The response of the Scientific Council to the ERC review report can be found under: http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ERCScientificCouncil_Response_to_ERC_Review_Report.pdf

Publications

New brochure on EU-funded malaria research

The Directorate “Health” of the European Commission’s DG Research has issued a very informative and graphically appealing leaflet on malaria research funded by FP6 and FP7. The brochure includes an overview of the research strategy, the funding committed under FP6 and

under FP7 so far, the most relevant projects, and an outlook on the future; moreover, it starts with a general explanation about malaria as a disease, including how it is transmitted, prevented and cured. This very elegant information material will not only be of interest to scientists and policymakers, but can definitely be used to bring European research closer to the public.

The leaflet "Fighting malaria" can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/health/infectious-diseases/poverty-diseases/doc/eu-funded-malaria-research-leaflet_en.pdf

FP7 Environment list of projects 2007-2009

DG Research has recently published a catalogue of FP7 projects in the Cooperation Theme 6, "Environment (including Climate Change)" that were started in the first three years of the programme (2007-2009). While the grouping per areas and activities provides somewhat of an overview, this publication is a mere list of projects with budgets and participants. It will certainly be a useful tool for scientists in the field, National Contact Points and Programme Committee delegates; however it is not foreseen as a publicity tool for the general public (unlike the malaria brochure mentioned above).

The Environment catalogue of projects 2007-2009 can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/pdf/fp7_catalogue.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none

Compendium of Euratom research and training projects

A recent publication from the European Commission details the research and training projects that have been funded by the Euratom FP7 programme so far. This publication will certainly be resourceful for scientists and policy-makers working in the field of nuclear fission.

The first volume of the FP7 Euratom projects compendium can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/energy/pdf/09_07_euratom.pdf

◆ Innovation

EC reviews its innovation policy and proposes a European Innovation Act

The new Commission of Jose Manuel Barroso could put innovation policy at the centre stage of the Commission activities. Some rumours even see innovation as a topic for which the Commission President could become responsible himself, whereas other observers expect that the current portfolios could be shuffled and a newly created portfolio might not only include innovation, but also other topics (such as ICT, transport or others) in order to streamline EU innovation efforts. In the light of these discussions it becomes obvious that the Commission is aiming for more progress in innovation in order to make Europe the world's leading knowledge-based economy.

A Communication and five staff working documents, published on 2 September, assess the current state of EU innovation policy. The Communication states that some progress could be made, e.g. though the Service Directive, the Small Business Act and new state aid rules that give Member States more effective public policy tools to support research and development. On the minus side the protection of intellectual property rights, mainly through the establishment of the Community patent remains an essential failure of the Community. Innovation in services and the use of ICT also have to be strengthened further. According to the Commission, innovation can be driven by regulation and standardisation, e.g. the new rules on car emissions, the REACH legislation, ecodesign measures and the Lead Market Initiative (LMI, see Synopsis 2007/9, 2008/7 and 2008/10). However, the LMI, presented in January 2008, has had so far only little impact. Synergies among higher education and research institutions and industry could be improved through a number of Joint Technology Initiatives (JTI) as well as through the European

Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). Only very little is written about the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP). For the future, the Commission concludes, more concentration of EU-level efforts on selected areas is needed and “the technologies the EU should master both in terms of research and production will have to be better defined to build synergies”.

On 24 September, the Competitiveness Council discussed, based on the Communication, the main strength and weaknesses of the present Community innovation policy, the key elements of a successful future EU innovation policy, and how the innovation capacity of SMEs could be improved. Conclusions on the EU innovation policy should be adopted during the Competitiveness Council in December.

Based on the findings of the present Communication, the outcome of an ongoing Public Consultation on EU innovation policy and the shortly expected report of a Business Panel, a European Innovation Act will be drafted and should be published in spring 2010. The act should give inputs to the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy.

The Communication as well as the staff working documents can be found here:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/documents/index_en.htm

The Public Consultation on the Community Innovation Policy is open till 16 November:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/policy/future-policy/consultation_en.htm

Gérard de Nazelle appointed EIT Director

On 18 September, the Governing Board of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) appointed Gérard de Nazelle as the first Director of the newly established institute. Mr. De Nazelle, a French citizen, will lead the EIT headquarter in Budapest during the next four years. He was previously Global Manager Innovation and Research at Shell, where he was responsible for the development of new technology options and clean energy futures.

The first call for proposal closed on 27 August and two or three Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KIC) will be selected till the end of the year (see Synopsis 2009/7). About 20 proposals were made. The seven-year framework agreement for KICs will be signed in the second half of 2010. Further calls can only be expected after some experiences with the first KICs have been made.

More information on the new Director can be found on the EIT website:
<http://eit.europa.eu/press/news-archive/single-view/article/first-eit-director-selected.html>

Publications

Communication on key enabling technologies published

On 30 September the Commission published a Communication on the key enabling technologies nanotechnology, microtechnology, advanced materials, biotechnology and photonics, and on how their industrial deployment on a broader scale can be achieved. The Commission is proposing a high-level expert group to develop a common strategy for the longer term and concrete actions properly coordinated at European level. On the basis of this work, the Commission will report back to the Council by the end of 2010.

The text of the Communication as well as a staff working document can be found here:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/ict/files/communication_key_enabling_technologies_en.pdf
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/ict/files/staff_working_document_key_enabling_technologies_en.pdf

EU-China management training programme extended

The European Commission and the Chinese government have agreed to renew the Managers Exchange and Training Programme (METP) by launching a fifth intake, in May 2010. The exchange programme offers the opportunity for executives of SMEs to undertake a ten-month

training period in China, including a language course and a three-month internship at a Chinese company.

More information on METP can be found on the following website:

<http://www.metp.net.cn/english/index.asp>

EUROSTAT publication: Science, Technology and Innovation in Europe

The newly published 2009 edition of “Science, Technology and Innovation in Europe” is divided into three main parts – Investing in R&D, Monitoring the knowledge workers, Productivity and competitiveness – and focuses above all on the 27 EU Member States and EFTA countries. China, Japan and the United States are also presented to allow for comparisons. Given the numerous data sources used for this publication, the period of time observed differs according to the different indicators (Government expenditure on R&D, R&D expenditure, R&D personnel, Innovation, Patents, High-tech industries and knowledge-based services, EU industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard).

In 2007, the EU-27 spent €229 billion on R&D, i.e. 1,85% of GDP. That lies still far behind the 3% target set by the Lisbon Strategy and it is significantly lower than in Japan (3,32%), Switzerland (2,9%) and the US (2,61%). However, the average GBAORD (Government budget appropriations or outlays on R&D) growth rate is considerably higher in the EU-27 (4.7%) than in Switzerland (1.3%) or the US (1.2%).

Furthermore, regarding innovation, Switzerland is considered by the 2009 European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) as one of the leading country, along with Denmark, Finland, Germany, Israel, Japan, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States (see Synopsis 2009/1).

The EUROSTAT publication can be found under:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-EM-09-001/EN/KS-EM-09-001-EN.PDF

◆ **Education**

Progress in Quality Assurance in European Higher Education

As highlighted by the first triennial report on quality assurance in European Higher Education from the European Commission, significant progress has been made both internally (within the institutions themselves) and externally (evaluation and accreditation of institutions and curricula) over the past few years. This first triennial report on quality assurance in higher education in Europe is published in response to a request from the European Parliament and the Council in 2006.

This first report looks at developments at national, European and international levels, and suggests a number of areas for further discussion and improvement, including the need to make the infrastructure of quality assurance more efficient for users.

At national level, many new quality assurance agencies have been created. Agencies now exist in 46 countries and are rather heterogeneous in terms of size, scope, status, focus and international capacity. At the European level, increasing awareness is given to European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance, thanks to the work of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), set up in 2008 (see Synopsis 2008/3), is also mentioned in the report as a major body in supporting the development towards more transparency and credibility in the European Higher Education Area.

The results of the report will be discussed for the first time under the Swedish EU Presidency at the meeting of Directors-General for Higher Education in Kalmar on 7 October. The Commission plans to publish a second report in this area in 2012.

Another report on the same topic and published by the European University Association (EUA) within a two-year EC funded project, expresses recommendations for the implementation of quality

assurance. It stresses in particular that the quality assurance processes in teaching and learning, used in universities, have to be given enough space for “risk taking and failure” which is considered as essential for stimulating innovation and creativity.

The triennial report of the European Commission can be found under:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/report09_en.pdf

The Recommendation of the EP and of the Council (15 Febr. 2006) on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education (2006/142/EC) is available under:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:064:0060:0062:EN:PDF>

The EUA report is available under:

http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/QAHECA_Report.pdf

New Comenius initiative for secondary school mobility

The European Commission set up a new fund under the Comenius programme, which is covering school education in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). The new initiative called “Comenius Individual Pupil Mobility” will support pupils at secondary schools spending between 3 to 10 months in a host school and a host family abroad. As tested during a pilot phase in 2007-2008, the action aims at offering students a European learning experience, broaden their understanding of the diversity of European cultures and languages and helps them acquire the skills they need for their personal development. The initiative will now be open to schools involved in a Comenius school partnership from the 2010-2011 school year onwards. Switzerland should become eligible for this scheme in 2011.

More information can be found under: http://ec.europa.eu/education/comenius/doc990_en.htm

Primary school education and quality of teachers debated by Education Ministers

The motivation, skills and competence of teachers as well as the quality of school leadership were mentioned as key factors in achieving high quality learning outcomes by the Education Ministers who met in Göteborg (Sweden) on 23-24 September 2009. The status of the teaching profession and the role of the school management were also discussed.

During their meeting, the Ministers agreed on the need for an EU-level network to ensure that teachers receive in-service training throughout their careers. Support is foreseen by supporting the establishment of a European network on the continuing professional development of teachers and school leaders and by encouraging the use of existing opportunities for teachers within the Lifelong Learning Programme. Furthermore, support and guidance should be provided to teachers when they enter working life.

The Commission and the Member States agreed to support the creation of a regular arena for the exchange of research evidence and good policy practices on the professional development of teachers and school leaders. The Open Method of Coordination should facilitate policy cooperation and peer learning in these matters.

The Swedish EU Presidency expects the conclusion of the information ministerial meeting to be adopted at the Education Council meeting in November.

The summary of the Swedish EU Presidency can be found under:

http://www.se2009.eu/polopoly_fs/1.16335!menu/standard/file/Summary.pdf

Background information as base for the discussion is available under:

http://www.se2009.eu/polopoly_fs/1.13697!menu/standard/file/Diskussionsunderlag.pdf

Publications

National testing of pupils increasing across Europe

The European Commission communicated on the number of national tests pupils have to take during their education. Based on the work of the Eurydice network – compiling data from 31 countries participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme – , the report named “National Testing

of Pupils in Europe: Objectives, Organisation and Use of Results” gives a comprehensive picture of Europe-wide patterns and trends regarding the objectives, frequency and scope of national tests in compulsory education. Regular national tests have become widely established across Europe. On average, European countries organize tests three times during compulsory education.

The report can be downloaded under:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_studies_en.php

Early Childhood Education and Care: key lessons from research for policy makers

Since 2006, various EU policy initiatives and events have highlighted the importance of quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC); pre-primary education is now defined as a priority in the Commission’s updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. Although the EU is a world leader in providing ECEC services, more still needs to be done, since it was revealed that investing in quality ECEC provision contributes to breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

Submitted to the Commission in June 2009 by the NESSE network of experts in social sciences of education and training, the report “Early Childhood Education and Care: key lessons from research for policy makers” reviews international evidence about the social benefits of ECEC. A key finding is that investing in quality ECEC is crucial since foundations for subsequent learning are laid at this stage. The report also points out that poor quality services may do more harm than good and that quality ECEC alone can not redress the effects of child poverty and disadvantages. Finally, the NESSE report reminds that ECEC policy development is a complex and mixed issue that requires an integrated approach at EU level.

The report can be found under:

<http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports/activities/reports/ecec-report-pdf>

◆ SwissCore Küche

Current and future EUROHORCs priorities presented in Brussels

Since 1992, EUROHORCs – European association of the heads of research funding organisations (RFO) and research performing organisations (RPO) – seeks to enhance the role of the national research funding and research performing organisations in Europe through creating a platform for discussion, initiating joint activities and strengthening their influence on European research policy. In the last few years, EUROHORCs has become an active player in the field of European research policy by promoting and enhancing inter-council cooperation and serving, amongst others, as advisory body for the European Commission.

On 1 October, Danièle Rod, Chair of EUROHORCs Management Committee and Head of International Co-operation at the Swiss National Science Foundation, presented the current and future priorities of EUROHORCs in Brussels. Members of IGLO (Informal Group of RTD Liaison Offices in Brussels) attended this informal briefing.

More information about EUROHORCs can be found under: <http://www.eurohorcs.org>