

SwissCore Synopsis

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

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◆ Seen from Brussels

A new strategy to address old problems

On 3 March, European Commission President Barroso presented a new strategy for the next ten years of the European Union, conveniently termed “Europe 2020”. This vision follows up on the notorious Lisbon Strategy, which on most accounts is considered to have failed. Notwithstanding the economic crisis, the Communication proposed bold moves forward and consists of the three pillars of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. While the latter two address sustainable development and social cohesion respectively, the first one concerns the knowledge and innovation-based economy. Due to our remit, we will only focus on the “smart growth” part of the “Europe 2020” strategy.

Under the heading “Smart growth – an economy based on knowledge and innovation”, the strategy proposes three “flagship initiatives”: first of all the creation of an “Innovation Union”, which includes the completion of the European Research Area, a Strategic Research Agenda focusing on challenges, the enhancement of Joint Programming with Member States, the creation of a single EU patent, the launch of “European Innovation Partnerships” and the fostering of the integration of the three sides of the knowledge triangle (research, innovation, education), for example through the EIT. The second initiative, “Youth on the move”, aims at promoting entrepreneurship, integrating and enhancing mobility programmes (Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, tempus and Marie Curie), modernizing higher education, promoting both formal and non-formal learning and supporting youth employment and mobility through a new scheme, “Your first EURES job”. The third flagship initiative “A Digital Agenda for Europe” mostly addresses the creation of a Digital Single Market and infrastructural measures to achieve access to high-speed internet for all. In addition, a “reform” of research and innovation funds in the ICT field is foreseen.

The smart, sustainable and inclusive growth pillars are complemented by a series of “headline targets” to be reached by 2020. Among those, the 3% of GDP for investment in R&D feels like a phoenix rising from the ashes of the Lisbon Strategy. Moreover, the target of raising the share of tertiary education holders from 31% to 40% will certainly throw a stone into the current debate on professional education going on in Switzerland.

More interesting than the mere numerical targets are certainly the “flagship initiatives”, which give more insight into how the European Commission intends to deliver on the proposed strategy. From these initiatives it seems that the research funding measures of the EU (i.e. the Framework Programme) will definitely be reoriented along “Grand Challenges” and that the innovation funding measures (e.g. CIP, SET plan) will be streamlined. However, behind these policy-inspired changes remains the thorny issue of simplification of the financial and administrative framework that underlies all EU programmes. Despite the grandness of the new strategy, success is often depending on an efficient implementation, and there the devil is in the detail. Instead of concentrating on reframing once again the policy scope of their research and innovation programmes, the Commission should perhaps better focus on getting the framework conditions right and letting science and innovation paint its own picture...

The “Europe 2020” strategy can be found under:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%2007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

◆ Research

7th Framework Programme (FP7)

Council conclusions on the review of the ERC

At its meeting of 1-2 March, the Competitiveness Council (Council of the EU) adopted conclusions regarding the review of the European Research Council (ERC). Acknowledging the excellent report of the independent review panel of 23 July 2009 (see Synopsis 2009/7), the response of the ERC’s Scientific Council of 25 August 2009 (see Synopsis 2009/8) and the

communication by the European Commission of 22 October 2009 (see Synopsis 2009/9), the ministers identified the following points in which further action would be required:

- In order to continually replenish the knowledge base of the ERC Executive Agency, the Commission should make possible the involvement of highly qualified research management experts and scientists for up to four years in addition to the permanent staff, for example through secondment.
- The Commission should ensure that scientists are better represented in the Steering Committee of the Executive Agency, and the Agency should be able to recruit highly qualified external scientists with experience in management.
- The Commission should make full use of the administrative flexibility when funding frontier research, especially regarding accounting and auditing procedures.
- More flexibility should also be introduced in the operations of the ERC Executive Agency.

Especially regarding the last two points, the ERC is seen by ministers as a pilot on how the entire Framework Programme could be simplified in a pragmatic and effective way. Therefore, they invite the Commission to explore new ways and means to achieve simplification. The Council further asks the Commission to carry out by July 2011 another independent evaluation as a follow up to the recommendations made in last year's review.

A new President for the ERC

Following the resignation of Prof. Kafatos (see Synopsis 2010/1), the ERC Vice-President, Prof. Helga Nowotny, was elected as the new President of the ERC and Chair of its Scientific Council on 19 February. She took office on 1 March. An Austrian national, Nowotny is Professor emeritus in social studies of science from ETH Zürich. Kafatos will remain a member of the Scientific Council and was elected ERC Honorary President.

The Council conclusions on the ERC review can be found under:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st06/st06361.en10.pdf>

A biography of Prof. Helga Nowotny can be found under:

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

Recommendations of the FP7 Advisory Group on SMEs

The participation of industry and particularly of SMEs in FP7 is essential; otherwise the programme would just be a purely academic exercise, hardly able to fulfil its mission to enhance the competitiveness of the European economy and to strengthen its knowledge base. The FP7 Advisory Group on SMEs gives regularly inputs in order to integrate SMEs better in FP7. In the 2009 recommendations the group stresses among others the following points:

- The target of having at least 15% SMEs among the participants of FP7 should be kept. Especially in the Cooperation pillar the 15% target should be an overarching goal and Programme Committees are therefore called to introduce as many support actions and joint calls as possible. The SMEs-go-Health initiative is mentioned as an example for such efforts.
- FP7 programme delegates should collect inputs among SMES in their countries concerning their research needs and use this information for the preparation of the Annual Work Programme.
- A minimum quorum for SME participation in each FP7 core programme and in the industry driven programs such as JTI should be implemented. In programmes outside FP7, such as CIP, SME focused measures to foster SME participation should be introduced as well. DG Research and DG Enterprise should cooperate more when developing and executing research and innovation programmes.

Concerning the Research for the benefit of SMEs funding scheme the Advisory Group recommends among others to use a small part of the available funding for demonstration activities, to increase annual funding to ease oversubscription and to increase the weight of the impact criterion. In general the group supports the idea to encourage demonstration activities in research projects in order to bring new developments closer to the market. The Advisory Group

recommends that the funding of ERA NETs should only be continued if there is a clear political will and commitment by the Member States and Associated Countries to develop the schemes.

The recommendations in its full length can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/pdf/advisory-groups/sme-recommendations-2009_en.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none

EU Research Policy

A new expert group report re-examines the role of research infrastructures in the ERA

In January, the European Commission published the report of an expert group entitled "A vision for strengthening world-class research infrastructures in the ERA". This publication follows up on a similar report published in March 2008 that had been drawn up by a panel of experts working in the context of the 2007 European Research Area (ERA) Green Paper discussions. The present publication aims at re-examining the role of research infrastructures within the ERA, especially in the light of the recent developments in this field. Indeed, in June 2008, the European Commission tabled a proposal for a new legal framework for European Research Infrastructures (ERIC), which was finally adopted by Council in June 2009 after much discussion (see Synopsis 2009/5).

In the report, the experts lay out a 2020 vision for European research infrastructures and make a series of recommendations divided in seven areas:

- The global role of research infrastructures: As today's scientific challenges often exceed the resources available at national or regional level, the global linkage of research infrastructures should be developed. Thus, the roadmap of the European Strategic Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) should link with non-European or international roadmaps and there should be a way to facilitate the use of European research infrastructures by scientists from outside Europe. Such international collaboration is especially important in the case of e-Infrastructures.
- The role of research infrastructures in strengthening the ERA: New approaches for European-wide collaborations for construction and use of research infrastructures should be established, especially through support of so-called Regional Partner Facilities. Special attention should be given to the inclusion of small or new EU Member States.
- Prioritisation procedures: Under this heading, the experts propose three alternative scenarios to prioritize research infrastructures at European level. First, the mandate of ESFRI could be adapted in order for them to set priorities across scientific disciplines. This is the scenario that the experts recommend. Second, the Commission could be charged with this mission as an "honest broker" (!). Third, a new entity reporting to the Council of the EU could be created for this purpose.
- Decision making, funding and governance process: The funding of research infrastructures has always been a thorny issue, especially with regard to running costs. The experts propose here a partial "Europeanisation" of national or regional facilities, along with the creation of specific European funding instruments and the attraction of private funds through public-private partnerships. One idea in this context is the creation of a specific "European Fund for Research Infrastructures" in the next Framework Programme.
- e-Infrastructures and access: Such infrastructures should move towards the development of integrated services. Moreover, the investments for High Performance Computing should be pooled at European level.
- The legal framework: Notwithstanding the existence of the ERIC regulation, the experts propose to take into account the protection of IPR through specific guidelines and to set up yet a new specific legal framework to facilitate the participation of the private sector and of non-European partners.
- Evaluation and impact assessment: Not surprisingly, the experts propose here to strengthen the methods used in impact studies, to develop common methodologies and to agree on a set of performance indicators.

Next to making some interesting new proposals, the main benefit of this report is that it provides a timely basis for the re-launch of discussions on the role of research infrastructures in Europe. As outlined in the report, national budgets will tighten and a common European approach will be necessary for European science to remain competitive. At the eve of the discussions regarding the future Framework Programme, focusing the attention on research infrastructures has the benefit of pinpointing an issue that will require ample discussion and cannot just be dealt with once all the rest has been settled.

The expert group report on research infrastructures can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/infrastructures/pdf/era_100216.pdf

Publications

NETWATCH: a platform for transnational R&D programmes

On 1 February, the European Commission launched NETWATCH, an information platform for the collaboration between transnational R&D programmes, notably the Commission's own ERA-NET scheme. NETWATCH provides very valuable information on participants in ERA-NETs, a calendar of calls and a list of joint calls launched, as well as a toolbox for call implementation. This website will certainly be an invaluable resource for programme officers managing ERA-NET participations as well as for officials from ministries and agencies owning or managing research programmes that could potentially benefit from participation in the ERA-NET scheme.

NETWATCH can be found under: <http://netwatch.jrc.ec.europa.eu/nw/>

A summary of aeronautics research under FP7

The European Commission has recently published a compendium of research projects in the field of aeronautics and air transport, covering the calls 2007 and 2008. In addition to the list and description of funded projects, a very complete introduction is giving an excellent overview on the challenges faced by aeronautics research today, as well as the instruments used by the Framework Programme to address those. Moreover, this part of the document details the progresses made by aeronautics research since FP5, especially concerning the participation of SMEs. Indeed, over 20% of the participations came from SMEs in the first two calls, while over 18% of the total budget was allocated to them.

This document will certainly be a very valuable source of information for scientists and policy makers working in this field.

The compendium can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/transport/pdf/project_synopses_en.pdf

A dedicated website for FP programme evaluation and monitoring

DG Research of the European Commission has created a dedicated website for FP programme monitoring and evaluation, containing all relevant information on this topic. This website will be a very useful resource not only for experts evaluating and monitoring programmes, but also for policy makers and government officials requiring a sound knowledge base to submit position papers and proposals for future Framework Programmes. The archive on the website contains for example all the external monitoring reports and yearly assessments from FP5 and FP6. In addition, the newest documents regarding FP7 (or parts of it) are also collected on the website.

The FP programme evaluation and monitoring website can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/index_en.cfm?pg=home

Sherpas' Group report tries to design the ideal home for future JTIs

Joint Technology Initiatives (JTI) represent the first experience with setting up Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in research at European level. They are supposed to play an essential role in raising private companies investment in R&D and thus reaching the so-called Barcelona target (3% of GDP spent for R&D, thereof two third by private companies), which is an integral part of the Lisbon strategy. Currently five JTIs are running: Clean Sky (aeronautics), Innovative Medicine Initiative (IMI), Fuel Cells and Hydrogen (FCH), ARTEMIS (embedded computing systems) and ENIAC (nanoelectronics). Three of them became already autonomous from the European Commission. In addition, three PPP have been launched within the European Economic Recovery Plan last summer and are implemented in FP7 (Factories of the Future, Green Cars initiative and Energy Efficient Buildings). A fourth PPP, Future Internet, is currently under preparation and will most likely be launched this spring.

JTIs and PPP respond to the need in relation to industry-driven research.

So far the experiences with JTIs have been mixed. In particular the business side complains about complicated and slow procedures and raises doubts whether the European Commission with its bureaucracy would be able to become a real partner for Public-Private Partnerships with the private sector. For this reason a JTI Sherpa Group, consisting of business representatives of all the JTIs and PPPs, was asked to give input to the Commission on possible improvements.

The report of the Sherpa Group mainly examines different legal options for future JTIs. It calls into question the current "Community body" status of JTIs and therefore examines other legal structures (such as a private law entity, contractual partnerships and others), which could better provide the necessary flexibility to fit the purpose of setting up and implementing JTIs as effective and efficient as possible.

The Sherpa Group recommends that PPPs and JTIs should be recognized as a special body under the revised Financial Regulation of the EU, given that under the current Financial Regulation no specific provisions are applicable to PPPs and JTIs. The revised Financial Regulation therefore should recognize PPPs explicitly as special bodies to which implementation tasks can be delegated and for which tailor-made provisions (e.g. in the staff rules or for simplified reporting requirements, including audits) can be developed.

The Sherpa Group thinks that the current revision of the Financial Regulation will provide an opportunity to recognize PPPs, including JTIs, as special bodies for which tailor-made provisions can be developed. This new provisions should be based on a more risk-tolerant and trust-based approach. The Financial Regulation of the EU is revised once every three years. Proposals for the next revision are to be brought forward by the Commission by May 2010.

Apart from the discussion on the appropriate legal status of PPPs and JTIs the report also recommends that SMEs should more effectively be engaged in JTIs and that the funding rates are comparable to those in the Framework Programme.

The full report can be found on Cordis:

http://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/jti/jti-sherpas-report-2010_en.pdf

Entrepreneurship in vocational education and training

The Spring European Council meeting of March 2006 underlined the need to encourage entrepreneurship education, which should be considered as a way to promote creativity, innovation and self-employment. In October 2006, the Commission published the "Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurship Education in Europe" listing good practices in this field.

In order to examine the current status of entrepreneurship education, the Commission, together with experts in the field of education and entrepreneurship, conducted a study – financed under the CIP – on entrepreneurship in Vocational Education and Training (VET). The project focuses more specifically on initial vocational training, since self-employment is considered as a very relevant and valuable option for graduates from this curriculum.

The study reveals that, although entrepreneurship is included in national vocational education curricula in a majority of EU countries, there is still a gap to be filled. For example, entrepreneurship training is completely neglected in some VET sectors; teaching methods are sometimes ineffective and teachers are not fully competent; entrepreneurship is often not linked enough to specific training subjects; and there is an obvious lack of cooperation between school and enterprises.

The report provides a series of recommendations on how public policies can support the teaching of entrepreneurship within vocational training and highlights best practices in VET schools. These best practices should now be disseminated, among other through the support of the European Commission. For public authorities, the first step should be to set up a steering committee for entrepreneurship education with representatives from the ministry of education and the ministry of economy. Eventually, entrepreneurship should be introduced as an explicit goal in the curriculum and teachers should be trained accordingly.

To sum up, the report clearly underlines the gap to be filled yet in entrepreneurship education and supports to that respect the conclusions of the newly published report “New Skills for New Jobs” (see article below), which also stresses the need to encourage entrepreneurship throughout the learning process.

You can find the report “Entrepreneurship in vocational education and training” under: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/education-training-entrepreneurship/vocational/entr_voca_en.pdf

Publications

What future role for European Technology Platforms?

The discussion about the so-called Grand Challenges has been stimulated by the Swedish EU Presidency and therefore it is not surprising that an Expert Group on European Technology Platforms (ETP) examines in its latest report the future role of ETPs in the light of the discussion on Grand Challenges.

According to the Expert Group numerous ETPs have recently formed joint activities to address themes beyond the scope of a single platform. Such a multidisciplinary approach offers the chance to tackle societal Grand Challenges and to find innovative products and services. The Expert Group recommends that in the future all ETPs should try to follow this example. ETPs should work in flexible clusters focusing on addressing key societal challenges facing Europe. These clusters should involve all relevant stakeholders, work across all aspects of the knowledge triangle (education, research and innovation), and be responsible for implementing potential solutions.

This newly formed cluster of ETPs would form an overarching Platform, named by the Expert Group as European Technology Integration and Innovation Platform (ETIP). In parallel the traditional ETPs would still exist, given that probably not all ETPs would agree on forming an ETIP. An ETIP cluster would not be a legal entity, but would be similar to ETPs today a flexible and voluntary gathering, free to organise as they see fit. Unlike ETPs the ETIPs would also include research funding organizations and policy makers at both EU and Member State level.

The full report can be found here:

ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/technology-platforms/docs/fa-industrialresearch-b5-full-publication-rp_en.pdf

New brochure on the European Green Cars initiative

The economic crisis had a very negative impact on the automotive sector and the European Commission therefore made an effort to launch the Green Cars Public Private Partnership (PPP) within FP7 last summer. In July 2009 four calls were launched to implement the research part of the initiative, with an overall budget of €108 million. More calls will follow and the topics to be funded will broaden to other areas, such as research into trucks, logistics and intelligent transport systems.

More information on the Green Cars initiative can be found in a new and handy brochure which has been recently published:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/transport/pdf/2010_green_car_flyer_en.pdf

◆ **Education**

Dossier: Swiss Association to the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)

The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) is the education programme of the European Commission for the period 2007-2013 and runs with a total budget of €6.97 billion. Its main objective is to foster cooperation and mobility between the different education and training systems within Europe.

The LLP is composed of four sectoral sub-programmes focusing on the different stages of education, which are backed by two other programmes: the Transversal Programme and the Jean Monnet Programme.

The sectoral programmes are Comenius for school education, Erasmus for higher education, Leonardo da Vinci for vocational training and Grundtvig for adult education. The Transversal Programme includes four key activities, namely policy development, language learning, ICT and dissemination and exploitation of projects results. The Jean Monnet Programme supports higher education institutions to stimulate reflection on the European integration process.

The LLP is managed by three entities. The DG Education and Culture (DG EAC) is responsible for designing the policy, whereas the implementation is performed both at European and national level. At European level the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) is competent for the centralized actions, namely the Transversal and the Jean Monnet programmes, as well as certain specific actions of the sub-programmes. The decentralized actions, mainly mobility activities, are implemented through the National Agencies established in each of the 31 participating countries.

Youth in Action Programme

The Youth in Action Programme (YiA) aims at improving the sense of active citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans between 13 and 30 years old. With a budget of €885 million for the period 2007-2013, it supports projects under five actions: Youth in Europe, European Voluntary Service, Youth in the World, Youth Support System and Support for European Co-operation in the Youth Field.

Swiss Association

On 15 February 2010, Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter, EU Commissioner for Culture, Education, Multilingualism, and Youth Androulla Vassiliou and Spanish Minister of Education Ángel Gabilondo Pujol signed in Brussels a Swiss-EU bilateral agreement that enables Switzerland to officially participate as associated country in the LLP and the YiA programme as from January 2011. The Swiss contribution for the years 2011-2013 amounts to €50.1 million.

Thanks to this agreement, Swiss citizens will be able to participate in LLP and YiA actions under the same conditions as EU nationals and Swiss organizations will be able to coordinate projects.

The State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) will remain responsible for the management of all projects that started before 2011. As from 2011, all projects (decentralized actions) will fall under the responsibility of a newly created Swiss National Agency. The Agency is currently being built up and should be operational by October 2010. The mandate for it was given to the "CH Stiftung für eidgenössische Zusammenarbeit" in Solothurn.

In the YiA programme, the first of five yearly application deadlines for the Swiss National Agency will be 1 February 2011. For the LLP, the deadlines vary according to the sub-programmes and the actions, but they usually range from January to March.

You can find more detailed information under:

LLP: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm

YiA: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/doc74_en.htm
Bilateral agreement CH-EU (Council Decision):
<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st13/st13104-re02.en09.pdf>

New Skills for New Jobs: expert group report

In December 2008, the European Commission launched an initiative to build stronger bridges between the world of education and training and the world of work. In order to ensure this better match between skills and the labor market, it is essential to assess the EU future skills need.

In late 2009, the Commission published 18 reports, which give an overview of the past, present and future situation in different sectors, such as the automotive or the transport sector. The CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) also produces regular skills supply and demand forecast for Europe. The latest CEDEFOP report “Future skills supply in Europe – Medium-term forecast up to 2020” suggests an increase in the need for high- and medium-level qualified workforce in Europe. Therefore, the initiative “New Skills for New Jobs” aims at developing more effective ways to analyze and predict which skills will be required in tomorrow's labor markets. Finally, the initiative “New Skills for New Jobs” led to the creation of an expert group, which published its final report on 4 February 2010.

The report provides independent advice and should help shape the new EU 2020 strategy (see p. 2). It lists 34 recommendations, gathered under four priorities: the need to provide the right incentives to upgrade and better use skills for individuals and employers; the need to bring the world of education and work closer together; the need to develop the right mix of skills; and the need to better anticipate future skills needs.

Like the report “Entrepreneurship in vocational education and training” (p. 6), the expert group report very much insists on the fact that education and work should not be separated. Governments, employers and individuals should share responsibility for investing in skills and develop the right mix of skills needed.

The joint progress report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, which was adopted by the Education Ministers on 15 February 2010, also stresses that particular attention should be given to establishing partnerships between the educational and training sector and the one of work.

In fact, building stronger bridges between school and business was one of the starting points of the initiative “New Skills for New Jobs” and it is also an essential conclusion of the expert group report. Therefore this issue is at the heart of the EU 2020 Strategy that should be adopted by the Spring European Council.

The report of the expert group “New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now” can be downloaded under:
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=en&eventId=232&furtherEvents=yes>

The 18 sectoral reports can be found under:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=784&langId=en>

The CEDEFOP report “Future skill supply in Europe: key findings Medium-term forecast up to 2020” can be found under:

http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/8016_en.pdf

The 2010 joint progress report on the implementation the work programme Education and Training 2010 can be found under:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st05/st05394.en10.pdf>

Publications

New EUA project on quality culture in European universities

Along with the Bologna Process, EU governments have committed to support the development of quality assurance within universities. In 2005, quality guidelines (European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area) have been proposed. However, so far, no study truly examined their impact and how they had been adopted across the 46 countries of the Bologna Process.

This is exactly what the European University Association (EUA), together with the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and QAA Scotland, intends to do. The study, which will be a follow up of the EUA Quality Culture project (2000-2006), will start with a survey on the institutional quality assurance in place in EU higher education institutions. A publication on good practices in internal quality assurance processes should be published by September 2011.

You can find more information on the project under:

<http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/quality-assurance/projects/eqc/>

To participate in the survey, please visit:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=XJXR4BMGaCwpzLL9JKI6LLzk1DAVXynjgHzsoaUZGxc%3d>

Another EUA project: Annual review of international higher education ranking

The European University Association (EUA) decided to publish a yearly review of university ranking, aimed at providing a critical evaluation of the methodologies used for the various rankings that already exist. The first review should be published in 2011 and will be accompanied by an annual ranking seminar to stimulate the debate.

Rankings and classifications are flourishing. Despite their flaws and often obvious shortcomings of criteria, they have an increasing impact on decision-making and activities in universities across Europe. Therefore, initiatives are taken to propose alternatives to traditional rankings: the European Commission launched a project to develop multi-dimensional ranking instrument (see Synopsis 2009/5) and the OECD is trying to assess learning outcomes on an international scale. With its annual review, the EUA wants to make sure that universities can influence the setting-up of those new ranking instruments.

You can find more information on this pilot project under:

<http://www.eua.be/eua-news/view-item/article/1004/>

LERU reports on researchers' perspective

The League of European Research Universities (LERU) has presented three papers on higher education aiming at improving comprehensively the overall perspective of researchers, especially related to their mobility.

- The first paper "Harvesting talent: strengthening research careers in Europe" underlines the main problems of the current European research career, namely the lack of transparency in the career path and the need of developing incentives in the research and working environment. The report presents the career maps of nine university systems, among these also the Swiss one.
- The second paper is on "Doctoral degrees beyond 2010: Training talented researchers for society" and pursues two main purposes: on the one hand to set out the LERU vision for doctoral education through the label "creative, critical and autonomous intellectual risk taker", on the other hand to identify the various skills requested by the employers that need to be developed during a doctoral study.
- The last paper "Improving the social security of internationally mobile researchers: Analysis and recommendations" focuses on the relation between social security and mobility of researchers, identifies the main related problems and concludes with nine recommendations for the European decision makers.

You can find more information under: <http://www.leru.org/>

Debate on Future and Emerging Innovation Technologies Flagships on 18 March

In coming years, the Future and Emerging Information Technologies (FET) will trigger visionary science and goal-driven large-scale European ICT research initiatives. In May 2009, the European Commission has tabled a Communication on FET named 'Moving the ICT frontiers' (see Synopsis 2009/6) stating that two first FET Flagship Initiatives should be launched by 2013. These long term FET Flagship Initiatives are set out to enhance the strength of the national research capacities on a European level.

The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL) is currently leading a frontier research project combining neurosciences and FET, aiming at creating a synthetic brain: the Blue Brain Project, which was explicitly mentioned in the FET Communication from 2009. This ambitious project should help to understand the human brain and the mystery of consciousness.

During an event organised by SwissCore and the Mission of Switzerland on 18 March, Dr. Zoran Stančič, Deputy Director General at DG INFSO, will present the strategic role of the FET scheme of the ICT programme and highlight the vision of the European Commission on FET Flagship Initiatives and how these actions can contribute to the EU 2020 strategy and in particular to the digital agenda. Prof. Henry Markram, Director of the Blue Brain Project, will describe a new dimension in computational neurosciences and its interaction with other research areas such as ICT and FET. Henry Markram will also illustrate why the major scientific and technologic challenges of the Blue Brain Project would be appropriate for becoming a EU FET flagship. Prof. Patrick Aebischer, President of the EPFL, will present the commitment of its institution to this revolutionary project, the partners involved, as well as the institutional strategic context in which it is embedded.