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Seen from Brussels

EU Research and the World Cup compete for public interest

June has been an active month on the public relations front for European research. The EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, held a public Q&A session broadcasted live on the web on 17 June. The event revealed little of novelty value but was rather designed to address a wider public interested in the activities of DG Research. In a similar vein, the European Commission's "Innovation Union" flagship initiative for research and development has created its own Facebook page. The European Research Council (ERC) has also held a public event this month as it awarded its 1000th grant at a special ceremony held in Munich on 24 June. This is a symbolic milestone in the relatively young but prestigious history of the ERC. Especially the Starting Grants have gained a high level reputation as a reward for excellence in science and Switzerland has been particularly successful with ERC submissions.

As if to prove that bringing EU science policy closer to the public pays off, a new Eurobarometer Report published on 21 June revealed that Europeans are indeed very much interested in science and want the EU to boost collaborative research. The survey, that covers 32 European countries and also includes data from Switzerland, shows that 69% of Europeans believe that EU funded collaborative research is in society's interest and that 62% agree that EU funded research is more creative and efficient than research carried out and funded by each Member State. Also, further collaboration between academic researchers and industry is supported by 69%. Overall, 79% of Europeans declare to be interested in scientific and technological developments, while only 65% state an interest in sports. However, some might suspect that there is a good chance that this trend was temporarily upset during the current Football World Cup.

Also in June, a Ministerial Conference on European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) held in Palma de Mallorca declared that the EU will add an additional €40 million to its contribution. The declaration was made following the positive mid-term evaluation of COST by a panel of independent experts. If the call for a budget increase is taken up, COST's total budget would rise to €250 million for the remaining duration of FP7.

Finally, before things quiet down during the summer, the European Council formally adopted the Europe 2020 strategy at its meeting on 17 June. The strategy was developed in response to the global financial crisis and hopes to generate employment and growth while reducing the substantial levels of debt (see Synopsis 2010/2). The strategy aims at long term structural reform and fiscal consolidation, rather than short term crisis management. Research and Development play a central role in the strategy and the goal of increasing R&D spending from currently 1,9% to 3% was reaffirmed by European Commission President José Manuel Barroso. To be formally adopted, the strategy now needs the approval of the European Parliament. The Member States will then have to implement the policies under the supervision of the European Commission.

The video of the Commissioner's webcast can be viewed here:
http://webcast.ec.europa.eu/eutv/portal/res/_v_fl_300_en/player/index_player.html?id=9442&pId=9439&userlocale=en
The Innovation Union Facebook page can be viewed here:
http://www.facebook.com/innovation.union
The Eurobarometer report can be found here:
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_340_en.pdf

Dossier: Treaty of Lisbon: reforms in research

On 1 December 2009, the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force. It brings several changes at European institutional and procedural level with the declared goal to make the EU more democratic, transparent and efficient.

People working in the European sector are still struggling with and adapting to the several newly introduced reforms. An emblematic example is the new prominent role of the European Parliament (EP) with broader competencies in several fields of the EU that affects EU institutional balances as well as, consequently, the political decision-making process and lobbying dynamics.

The major changes in the field of research are related to articles' numbering and new terminology. It is useful though, to get used to them as soon as possible, since they will rule the EU working

procedures and routines in this field from now on. Therefore an overview of these modifications is presented in the following lines.
First of all, the Lisbon Treaty amends the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) and the Treaty of the European Community (TEC). In particular, the second one is renamed and becomes the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). In fact, the term "Community" does not exist anymore in the EU terminology, as it will be overall substituted by "Union".
The consolidated version of the modified Treaties sees the change of the articles' numbering, included in the chapter of research. Research is covered in Part Three, Chapter XIX of the TFEU under the title "Research and Technological Development and Space". It includes articles (Art.) 179 to 190.
The direct consequence is that "the article 169 initiative" is now based on Art. 185 TFEU (ex Art. 169 TEC), whereas the Joint Technology Initiative (JTI) is now regulated by Art. 187 TFEU (ex Art. 171 TEC). There are no further changes for these two initiatives; in particular their content remains the same.
Another novelty regards the naming of the "codecision procedure", involving equally the European Council and the EP in the adoption of the legislative proposal of the European Commission (EC); this becomes "ordinary legislative procedure". This procedure applies to the adoption of the legal frames of the Framework Programmes (FP) as well as to the launch of initiatives according to Art. 185 and 187 TFEU.
Finally space research and the European Research Area (ERA) receive their own article. Art. 189 TFEU provides the legal basis for a European space policy, a shared competence with the Member States. Art. 179 TFEU regards the ERA that is presented as a mean to strengthen the scientific and technological basis of the EU. Its declared key element is the free circulation of researchers, of scientific knowledge and of technology.
It will take some time before the new terminology and numbering will enter the daily common use. Anyway, after a decade of negotiations and new treaties (Treaty of Amsterdam, Treaty of Nice, Constitutional Treaty), the Lisbon Treaty has no leftover. It provides the frame for a more sustainable functioning of the EU in spite of the enlargement to 27 Member States. No new Treaty is expected to be negotiated in the next years. The upcoming challenges will have to fit the actual European structure.

Background information on the Lisbon Treaty can be found under:
http://europa.eu/press_room/press_packs/lisbon_treaty/index_en.htm

Research

Priorities for research of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council
On 1 July 2010, Spain handed over the six-month Presidency of the Council of the EU to Belgium. The proposal for the Belgian programme was approved by the European Council on 17 June.
The priorities for the Belgian Presidency include the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon and the launch of the Europe 2020 strategy – which was also approved by the European Council on 17 June 2010 and will guide EU policies in the coming decade. The Belgian Presidency's general goal with regard to research and innovation is the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA). Efforts will focus on realizing the target of 3% of GDP investment in research and innovation.
Belgium advocates good coordination, simplification, better access and more coherence between the available programs and instruments. This means that the six months of the Belgian Presidency will be a busy period in the R&D field. The mid-term review of FP7 will be discussed while at the same time the preparations for the next Framework Programme will pick up pace. Special attention will be given to the ongoing discussion on simplification of the administrative and financial control procedures of the Framework Programme and of the EU, as well as to the

Joint Undertakings (JU), which have been at the center of recent debates. The Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs), which have created a lot of expectations, still need to be fully implemented. Belgium has announced its support and will give particular attention to the first list of themes adopted last December (see Synopsis 2009/10). However, the JPIs will have to be clearly defined and a common interpretation of their operation and goals has to be found first. The adoption of the Framework Conditions is expected for the end of this year.
According to its declared priorities, Belgium wishes to emphasize the role of the regions in the fields of research and European scientific policies. Regions are often the closest units to universities, research centers and SMEs. Therefore the regional dimension is seen as especially important for the development, implementation and follow-up of the EU research and innovation policies, in particular in light of possible synergies with initiatives co-financed by the Structural Funds.
Facilitate access for SMEs and in particular for small businesses to European R&D instruments and improve their efficiency; for example the ERA-NET, the JTIs and the initiatives under Article 185 TFEU (formerly Article 169 TEC) such as the Eurostars Programme, is another stated priority of the Belgian Presidency.
In order to prepare the Research and Innovation Plan, expected for September 2010, a joint Informal Council of research and industry ministers is scheduled later this month. Belgium has declared a particular interest in biotechnology and life sciences and will therefore put these themes on the agenda of the biennial ICT conference in September.
Belgium has committed itself to enhance mobility and research infrastructures. It intends to support the implementation of the Ljubljana process aiming at developing the European partnership on researchers' careers and mobility by removing administrative barriers as well as securing the implementation of the roadmap for pan-European research infrastructures.
Every hand-over of the Presidency of the EU Council generates big expectations and Belgium has set some high goals. It remains to be seen how successful it will be in achieving them.

More information can be found on the website of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU: http://www.eu2010.be/

EU launches supercomputing partnership PRACE
The partnership for Advanced Computing in Europe (PRACE), launched on 9 June in Barcelona with a budget of €500 million, will enable researchers to use supercomputers located in other European countries. Spain, France, Italy and Germany have each committed to invest €100 million in the PRACE initiative over the next 5 years. The European Commission (EC) is contributing €70 million through FP7. Sixteen other countries, including Switzerland, are also taking part with smaller contributions of resources and expertise.
PRACE, an international non-profit association, will bring together supercomputers of world-class capability across Europe to form a single infrastructure. PRACE will provide researchers a combined computing power equivalent to more than 100'000 of today's fastest PCs. Up to 1000 trillion calculations per second will be possible. This means that research can be conducted incomparably faster, at massive scale and far more accurately.
Scientist will be able to fully use the PRACE infrastructure from 1 August 2010, after their application has been approved by a common European Peer Review process. The first supercomputer available to all European researchers is the JUGENE system located in Jülich (Germany). It is for the time being the fastest computer in Europe and fifth fastest in the world. More supercomputers will be made available from 2011 onwards.

For more information on PRACE: www.prace-project.eu

Space: EC announces upcoming call and EP clears way for GMES funding

The European Commission (EC) negotiated research contracts with 108 successful space and security research consortia during the month of June. The contracts are worth a total of €324 million. The 108 successful proposals were shortlisted from over 700 submissions and comprise €114 million (68 projects) for the FP7 Space Theme and €210 million (40 projects) for the FP7 Security Theme. International cooperation has increased in FP7 space research, in particular with regards to American participation. NASA and several American universities are involved in 15 of the proposals. SME participation is also higher than average with a SME participation rate of 20% (compared to the FP7 average of 16% SME participation). Over the six year running period of FP7 (2007-2013) €1.4 billion have been reserved for space research and €1.35 billion for security. On 20 July 2010, the European Commission is set to launch the fourth wave of calls for space and security research projects and a positive funding trend is anticipated.

Also in June, the European Parliament (EP) cleared the way for the adoption of the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security programme (GMES), a European earth observation satellite system. The approval by the EP puts in place a financial envelope of €107 million for the initial phase of GMES, which will be supplemented with an additional €209 million from the FP7 Space Theme. The GMES will make a contribution to the surveillance of the oceans, the upper atmosphere and climate change as well as to security (eg. monitoring borders).

Finally, the EC presented a new action plan for the development of satellite navigation applications. The plan includes the allocation of €38 million FP7 funds to research proposals on application of Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS). By supporting research into GNSS applications the EC hopes to boost the development of the Galileo and EGNOS satellite navigation programmes, which would relieve Europe from its dependency on military-inspired (and less accurate) GPS systems that are beyond direct European control. With the EU Council of Ministers adopting a mandate for talks with Switzerland, everything is now in place for a start to the negotiations on the Swiss participation in Galileo and EGNOS programmes as well.

Read the full text of the EP resolution on GMES here:
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2010-0214+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

Publications

Ten recommendations to improve the European Research Area

During a conference in Seville in early May, Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn asked the members of the European Research Area Board (ERAB) to provide her with concrete actions to optimise research, innovation and science in Europe. The ERAB is the recently instated body charged with realizing the European Research Area (ERA) and its recommendations give a broad view of where it will place its priorities.

In June the ERAB issued its answer to the Commissioner's call and presented its ten recommendations.

The recommendations range from short-term actions to be implemented immediately over, mid-term actions for the next three to five years as well as long-term actions. Among other the list includes creating a single EU-patent and a European single market for research and innovation, streamlining funding schemes for the next Framework Programme (FP) and making result oriented and risk tolerant research the dominant criterion for funding.

These recommendations will feed in all current debates, such as for the Research and Innovation Plan expected in September, the simplification of the current FP and the design of the next FP.

For a full and detailed list of the ERAB recommendations visit the link below:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/erab/pdf/10-recommended-actions-final-online_en.pdf

New ERA website

The official website of the European Research Area (ERA) has been redesigned and renewed. The portal appears in a very fresh and modern look and presents the latest news, useful links, as well as an overview of all important events with the opportunity to add them directly to your e-calendar. The website also offers you a search function which is very helpful for finding a wide range of documents sorted by category, source or year.

Within the new ERA website you can learn more about what ERA is, why it is needed, who benefits, the history and the milestones of the ERA vision. The site does not target only specialists; it is a project designed to make Europe a place where scientific research, technological development and innovation is accessible for everyone.

Link to the new ERA website: http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/index_en.htm

FP simplification and university ranking commented by LERU

The League of European Research Universities (LERU) – in which the universities of Geneva and Zurich are members – recently published two position papers. The first paper comments on the FP7 simplification proposals made by the European Commission (EC) at the end of April (see Synopsis 2010/4) and the second paper supports the current approach of the European Commission for a new type of university mapping and ranking (see Synopsis 2009/5 and 2008/10).

In the recommendations addressed to ensure the attractiveness of the Framework Programmes for research, LERU strongly supports many of the EC proposals for simplification, in particular the removal of timesheet controls and the drastic reduction of the variety of funding rules under the motto "few sizes fit most". On the other side, LERU expresses some reserves about a possible radical shift towards output-based research funding which would imply, among others, to set a clear definition and understanding of output. As alternative, LERU proposes a trust-based certification approach, with radically reduced reporting procedures for institutions with reliable track records. LERU recommends that the EC accepts the usual accounting practices as well as the current certification of universities by the national funding authorities, and limits itself to certifying the national certification systems. The output-based approach would be used to detect dysfunctional projects and should not be the basis for awarding the funding in the first place. The LERU proposal will certainly launch more debates in the current simplification discussion.

In its second publication, LERU comments on two recent initiatives of the EC:

- the U-Map project aims at classifying the universities by determining indicators that the institutions could freely choose to characterize them.
- the U-Multirank project wants to set up a multi-dimensional global university rating, in opposition to the monotonic rankings such as the one compiled by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Ranking. Currently the questionnaires developed for the comparison are being tested in 10 international institutions while the pilot study will involve 150 institutions of which half will be non-European universities. Results are expected in June 2011 but an interim progress report of the feasibility study has already been published at the beginning of 2010.

LERU hopes that these two new European initiatives will bring a better understanding of rankings and describe better the diversity of universities' functions.

Both LERU's publications are available on their association's website:
http://www.leru.org/files/publications/LERU_Advice_paper_FP8_final.pdf
http://www.leru.org/files/publications/LERU_AP3_2010_Ranking.pdf
More information on the initiatives U-Map and U-Multirank can be found under:
http://www.u-map.eu/
http://www.umultirank.eu/
The interim progress report of the U-Multirank project is available under:
http://www.cheps.org//UMR_IR_0110.pdf

Scientix – new online platform for Science Education
At the beginning of June, the European Commission (EC) launched Scientix, a new web portal for teachers, researchers, policy makers, local actors, parents and for everyone else interested in science education. The website provides teaching material, research results and policy documents from European science education projects. It gives access to the main findings of European science education projects financed by the EU under FP6 and FP7, the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) and various national initiatives. Furthermore, the community aims at organising several events and workshops over the next three years. The main one should be the Scientix conference on 6-8 May 2011. The new portal is available in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Polish and also sends out a monthly newsletter.
Scientix is carried out by European Schoolnet (EUN) on behalf of the EC, DG Research – FP7 Science in Society Progamme.

Link to SCIENTIX – the Community for Science Education in Europe: http://scientix.eu

Innovation

Dossier: Update on EU Innovation Plan
How can innovation actually be measured?
The so-called Barcelona goal of spending at least 3% of GDP for R&D has been crucial to the Lisbon Strategy as well as to the new EU economic strategy Europe 2020 which will shortly replace the Lisbon Strategy. However, compared to the importance of this 3% input indicator very little attention has been given so far to the measurement of the concrete output of R&D. With Europe 2020 this shall now change. Indeed, already during the Spring European Council EU Member States agreed that an indicator should be developed that better reflects the R&D output of each country (see also Synopsis 2010/4).
In order to develop such a completely new monitoring mechanism, Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn has appointed a group of high level experts on innovation (see also Synopsis 2010/4). Chaired by Professor Andreu Mas-Colell (a professor for economy at the University Pompeu Fabra in Spain and Secretary General of the ERC), the group aims to advice the European Commission (EC) on a new indicator for measuring the extent to which Europe has developed toward a more innovative economy. This output indicator will complete the 3% of GDP investment objective in R&D which is part of the Europe 2020 strategy. The new indicator will aim at assessing overall research and innovation and finding the reasons why this differs from one Member State to the next. The indicator might be presented in the context of the European Research and Innovation Plan, to be called the Innovation Union, which will be published in September 2010.
Among the 13 members of the group is also Professor Dominique Foray, who holds the Chair of Economics and Management of Innovation at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). DG Enterprise and DG Research, in cooperation with economists from the other Commission services and in consultation with OECD experts, will assist the work of the High-Level Panel. For the moment it is unclear what the relation of the new indicator to existing instruments for measuring innovation will be, for instance to the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS).
EU and US: Competitors or partners in innovation?
In her first visit outside the EU as Commissioner for Research and Innovation, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn travelled to the United States, where she met with members of the US Congress and Administration, including John P. Holdren, President Obama's main scientific advisor, Trade Secretary Gary Locke, Energy Secretary Steven Chu and Bard Gordon, who chairs the lower House of Congress' Science and Technology Committee. Geoghegan-Quinn outlined the EU future research and innovation policy to her counterparts, stressing the need to develop an innovation indicator and highlighting energy, health and food security as top priorities of future EU research and innovation initiatives. The Commissioner also said that she was keen to develop a new EU

instrument to make it easier for SMEs to get access to venture capital. The discussions also included topics like genetically modified organisms (GMOs), an area where EU and US attitudes diverge sharply, or in general the more innovation-friendly framework in the US in comparison with Europe.
According to Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn, the Europe 2020 strategy should foster transatlantic investment and could even become the basis for what she called a "Transatlantic Innovation Partnership". However, Geoghegan-Quinn stressed that despite the importance of their joint work the EU and the US will remain competitors, a fact which she considers as a true driver for excellence and improvement: "The trick is to know when to go alone and when to work together – with whom and in what field. It is a wholesome blend of competition and collaboration that fuels the engines of progress."

For more information on innovation policy developments check out Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn's recent webstreaming event "Creating an Innovation Union" from 17 June:
http://webcast.ec.europa.eu/eutv/portal/res/_v_fl_300_en/player/index_player.html?id=9441&pId=9439&userlocale=en

Final endorsement of BONUS by European Parliament
The EU will contribute €50 million to the BONUS research programme to fight pollution in the Baltic Sea. This seven-year programme under Article 185 of the EU Treaty (previously Article 169 TEC) will bring together Baltic Sea research programmes of eight EU Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden) who will contribute another €50 million (see Synopsis 2009/9).
BONUS will be implemented in two phases: a Strategic Phase during 2010-2011, followed by an Implementation Phase during 2012-2016. The Strategic Phase (€1.25 million EU funding) will prepare the implementation by producing the Strategic Research Agenda, setting up the Stakeholder Consultation Platforms, and preparing the implementation modalities. The Implementation Phase (€48.75 million EU funding) will last for five years. During this time at least three calls for proposals will be published with a view to funding projects which address the objectives of the BONUS joint programme. These calls will be targeted at multi-partner and trans-national cooperation, and include research, technological development, training and dissemination activities.
BONUS will be implemented by the Baltic Organisations' Network for Funding Science (BONUS EEIG), established in Helsinki. It follows the previous programmes BONUS ERA-NET and BONUS ERA-NET PLUS and is the fourth joint programme launched under Article 185 (see Synopsis 2008/1 and 2006/3-4).

More information on BONUS can be found here: http://www.bonusportal.org/

Four European Industrial Initiatives launched at SET Plan Conference in Madrid
New and more efficient energy technologies are decisive when fighting against climate change and securing energy supply. The SET Plan (Strategic Energy Technology Plan) of the EU is thus the technology pillar of the EU energy and climate policy. It sets out a long-term energy research, demonstration and innovation agenda.
The European Energy Research Alliance (EERA) has launched four new Joint Research Programmes to help strengthen, expand and optimise European energy research. Following the SET Plan indications, these Joint Programmes try to respond to the need for better coordination among Member States, maximising synergies and identifying priorities for future funding. The programmes try to constitute strategic permanent collaborations between major research organisations and institutes forming a virtual centre of excellence. The four Joint Programmes are on Wind, Photovoltaic, Smart Grids and Geothermal. They have been officially launched during the SET Plan conference, which took place on 3-4 June 2010 in Madrid.
Another element of the SET Plan are seven European Industrial Initiatives (EIIS) on Solar Energy, Bioenergy, Wind Energy, Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS), Smartgrids, Smart Cities and Sustainable Nuclear Fission. They bring together the industry active in each of these areas and each initiative has set a technology roadmap. The first four initiatives on solar, wind,

electricity grids and CCS have been officially launched by issuing a Joint Statement supported by the public (European Commission, Member States) and private side (industry) at the SET Plan conference in Madrid on 3 June. In more specific terms the public and private side agreed on supporting:

- Technology Roadmaps (2010-2020) including concrete action plans to develop the technologies and improve their competitiveness;
- Implementation Plans which focus on the priority actions for 2010-2012;
- a light and non-bureaucratic governance structure that involves both the public as well as the private side while preserving full sovereignty over the use of their own resources.

In the Joint Statement the European Commission committed itself to focus the existing EU research, technology and innovation programmes in the field of energy to support the Technology Roadmaps and the Implementation Plans of the EIIS. Next step will be to put into operation the actions envisaged by the four EIIS and to create effective projects which will make better use of public and private resources.

More information on the Joint Programmes as well as on the EIIS can be found on the websites of the European Energy Research Alliance and the European Commission:
www.eera-set.eu
http://ec.europa.eu/energy/technology/initiatives/initiatives_en.htm

Publications

Europe 2020 – Innovation insights from research in socio-economic sciences
A conference on 1 June in Brussels took stock of insights from European research in socio-economic sciences with regard to the points outlined in the Europe 2020 strategy. The presentations of the conference can be found on the website of DG Research:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/events-107-presentations_en.html

Conference on Industrial Technologies in Brussels on 7-9 September 2010
On 7-9 September 2010, a major conference in the area of Industrial Technologies will be organised by the European Commission in cooperation with the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council. The focus will be put on nanotechnologies and nanosciences, materials and manufacturing technologies, which are the key areas of the FP7 NMP theme. The conference is supported by the Manufuture European Technology Platform, which is promoting the use of new enabling technologies in the Factories of the Future PPP.

Information on the European Industrial Technologies Conference can be found here:
http://www.industrial-technologies2010.eu/

Education

EC wants to foster Vocational Education and Training
On 9 June, the European Commission (EC) adopted a Communication proposing a ten-year plan to give new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET).
The plan builds upon the Europe 2020 strategy (see Synopsis 2010/2) and should be linked with the forthcoming Youth on the Move initiative (see Synopsis 2010/4). Altogether they are part of the Copenhagen Process on enhanced European co-operation in VET launched in 2002 and reviewed every two years.
The proposed plan aims at modernizing VET, enhancing its attractiveness and improving the quality of the teaching. The Communication mentions several ways to foster VET, including:

- Ensuring open and flexible access to training and qualifications at all stages of life;
- Promoting mobility and the gain of experience abroad or in a different economic sector;

- Ensuring the highest possible quality of education and training;
- Providing more opportunities for disadvantaged groups such as school drop-outs, the low-skilled and unemployed, people with migrant backgrounds and the disabled;
- Nurturing creative, innovative and entrepreneurial thinking in students.

The EC plan proposes a vision for the future of VET. Together with its priorities, this will be discussed by the EU Education ministers, the European Social Partners and the EC at the next Copenhagen Process meeting in December 2010 in Bruges. The result of this debate should be an ambitious modernisation agenda for the coming ten years with short term objectives that will be regularly reviewed.
The main message of the Communication is that the modernisation of VET is essential to meet the challenges that several forecasts on future skills have highlighted, namely the greater demand for medium- and high-level qualification by 2020. The Council of Ministers for Education has also underlined the importance of lifelong learning and mobility in its conclusion on "New Skills for New Jobs" (see next article). So, while jobs and social structure are changing, the need for initial and continuing VET becomes more and more imperative.

EC Communication on VET: http://ec.europa.eu/education/vocational-education/doc/com296_en.pdf

A new committee for education brings together education institutions and labor market
On 11 June, the European Commission (EC) launched a new social dialogue committee in education, which counts as the first forum devoted to the education sector. Its aim is to tackle the challenges faced by the sector such as public spending cuts and teacher recruitment.
In 1998, the EC decided to establish sectoral dialogue committees to promote European social dialogue between social partners. These committees can initiate joint actions and adopt guidelines and agreements. So far 39 sectoral social dialogue committees have been set up.
The new committee for education comprises teachers, trainers, lecturers and education authorities from across the EU and involves also trade unions and employers' organizations from the educational sector. It will cover all educational levels from pre-primary, primary and secondary education, over vocational education and training, to higher education and research. They will discuss issues such as the quality of education, classroom violence or the impact of demographic trends.
This new committee was established to answer to the great constraints affecting the educational sector, especially the budget cutting due to the economic crisis. It stands also as recognition of the importance of a sector that employs 14.7 million workers in the EU, educating 93 million pupils and students every year and that represents 5.7% of EU GDP.
On 7 June, the Council of Ministers for Education released its conclusions on "New Skills for New Jobs: the way forward". It stresses the importance of cooperation between education institutions and the labor market in order to develop key competences and to identify priorities. In fact the new EC committee should also work as a contact point between the dimensions of education and labor.

Press release for the social dialogue committee in education:
http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/721&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en
Council conclusions on "New Skills for New Job":
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/114962.pdf

Publications

Challenge for gender equality in education
On 7 June, the European Commission presented a new report 'Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes' which underlines how gender inequality in education is addressed in Europe. The study was carried out by the Eurydice education network and includes data from 29 countries (all EU Member States except Bulgaria, plus Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway).
With a few exceptions all European countries have, or plan to have, gender equality policies in education. The study shows though that gender differences still persist in both choice of study

and achievements. On the one hand, boys are more likely to be poor performers in reading and to drop out of school or repeat school years. On the other hand, girls are more likely to be low achievers in mathematics but obtaining higher grades and higher pass rates in school-leaving examination. There are not many initiatives in place to address gender patterns in achievement. Where they exist, the most common policies tackling gender gaps concern boys' under-achievement.
The education systems are still managed by men and the proportion of women among teaching staff in higher education institutions declines with every step on the academic career ladder. Only around two thirds of countries have gender equality policies in higher education. Almost all these policies aim at encouraging women to choose technology and natural science careers.

Link to the study: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_studies_en.php

Record number for Erasmus scheme
In the academic year 2008-2009, almost 200'000 higher education students took part in the Erasmus programme and went abroad for studies and company placements. According to the European Commission (EC), which published the figures on 21 June, this is a record number showing an overall increase of 8.7% compared to the previous academic year. In fact, a total of 198'600 students went to one of 31 countries (EU Member States plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey). The most popular destinations were Spain (33'200), France (24'600) and Germany (22'000). Since 2007 Erasmus offers also the opportunity for placements in business and other organizations. In this regard the EC notes the biggest increase, up more than 50% from the previous year. The average duration of such placements was around 4.5 months and students received a monthly grant of €432. Further, Erasmus supported more than 36'000 exchanges of staff from higher education institutions. The EC believes that the Erasmus scheme can contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy. In any case, it will be difficult for the programme to keep this high rate of growing success in the coming years without additional resources.

Link for further information: http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc920_en.htm

SwissCore Küche

New staff entrances at SwissCore
In the middle of June Stephan Kuster joined the SwissCore team as its newest European Advisor. A political scientist by training, Stephan comes to Brussels after six years as a researcher at the universities of Fribourg and Zurich. During that time he worked on his own PhD project on formal and informal political institutions in Latin America as well as in the coordination of research projects involving Swiss and international researcher teams. Stephan brings his international background – he was born in Colombia and has lived outside Switzerland for nineteen years in total – and a variety of languages (German, French, English, Italian and Spanish). He succeeds Thomas Marty and is looking forward to continue the fruitful relationships and good work with you.
Monika Stach joined the SwissCore team at the beginning of June. Just before moving to Brussels, she finished her Bachelor degree in Social and Political Science at the University of Berne. Monika gained amongst other experiences while participating to the World MUN (Model United Nations) in The Hague in 2009 and writing her Bachelor thesis on international organisations and cooperation. This highly raised her interest in international relations and in the EU. The traineeship at SwissCore gives her a perfect opportunity to put into practice her theoretical knowledge acquired during the University studies and to take a first step into the working world of international institutions and organisations. She likes the multicultural flair of Brussels and she's looking forward to gaining invaluable and enriching experience in the coming nine months.