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Crucial year for research and innovation

2011 is the year in which the preparations for the next Framework Programme for Research will develop in earnest. The European Commission (EC) plans to present its formal proposal by the end of the year and will hold a public consultation as well as conduct an ex-ante impact assessment before the summer. The large amounts of preparatory work required could already be felt during the last months of 2010. During the first month of 2011 many activities in the research and innovation field were clearly determined by the preparations of what – due to a lack of a better name so far – everyone is still calling “FP8”.

The New Year marks the beginning of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, which was taken over from Belgium on 1 January 2011 and during which Hungary has the responsibility to coordinate the above mentioned work during the first semester of 2011 (see article on page 3).

In January the EC adopted three new measures that should help reduce the administrative burden in the management of research projects in FP7 and lead the way to further simplifications for the next Framework Programme. The new measures are a welcome step but fall short of the expectations of the research community (see article on page 4).

The EC also launched the latest and last Flagship Initiative on 26 January 2011: “Resource-efficient Europe”. The initiative aims at generating competitive benefits to European industry through more efficient use of natural resources, reduced dependency on raw materials and lower CO2 emissions. It is a strategic policy guideline for the EU institutions and the Member States. It lists a number of specific initiatives to be started in 2011 that cover such areas as: low-carbon economy, energy efficiency, transport, biodiversity, agriculture, commodity markets and not least research and innovation (see article on page 6).

Several announcements concerning the European Research Council (ERC) were made at the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011. Before Christmas, the EC had announced the creation of a special task force to explore options for the future governance of the ERC (see Synopsis 2010/10). Some more details about the compositions of the task force have been released since then. The task force will be chaired by Robert-Jan Smits, Director General of DG Research and Innovation and includes representatives from the EC and the ERC’s Scientific Council, including its President Helga Nowotny. In addition, two external members will be part of the task force: former President of the Republic of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga and Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker, former Secretary General of the ERC. At the same time the ERC announced that Pablo Amor had been appointed as interim Director of the ERC’s governance. The task force intends to finish its work within 6 months.

In January 2011 the ERC appointed 7 new members of the Scientific Council. The new members were identified by the recently created independent Identification Committee and will be in office from 2 February 2011 until the end of 2013. No Swiss are among them. Finally, the results of the 2010 call for ERC Advanced Grants (AdG), published in January 2011, show
that Switzerland continues to perform well in the ERC schemes (see article on page 5).
A high-level panel has presented the interim evaluation report on Ambient Assisted Living (AAL), a joint programme on ICT technologies to the benefit of older people under Article 185 of the Functioning of the EU Treaty. The evaluation finds that SME participation has surpassed expectations but the gap between results and market take-up is still a concern (see article on page 10).
The first formal request to set up an ERIC (European Research Infrastructure Consortium) has been submitted to the EC in January 2011. The consortium with the acronym SHARE-ERIC is made up of Austrian, Czech, German and Dutch partners and proposes an infrastructure of micro data of households and individuals for the study of ageing. The request will be evaluated and a decision is expected in about two months time.
As Europe continues to tackle the difficult recovery from the economic crisis, the European University Association (EUA) has published a report on the impact of the crisis and resulting spending cuts on higher education (see article on page 12). With its commitment to reaching the 3% of GDP spending target in research and innovation throughout Europe, the EU will need all the support it can get from the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU for the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy and its Flagship Initiatives. The results of the ERC grants have shown continuously that those countries which invest most in research and innovation are the most attractive for the leading researchers to work in. In times of austerity the famous European added value in research and innovation policies needs to be more visible than ever. Calls against spending cuts in research will go unheard if they are not followed by concrete measures to assure sound and sensible management rules in the EU’s own funding programmes.

Hungarian priorities for research and innovation

On 1 January 2011, Belgium handed over the six-month Presidency of the Council of the EU to Hungary, the last member of the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian trio. Hungary has announced its Presidency Programme and its priorities in all policy areas of the EU, including research, innovation and education. Implementing the Europe 2020 strategy and its Flagship Initiatives, including the Innovation Union, is one of the general targets to which Hungary has pledged to give priority. Another goal is the creation of jobs and ensuring competitiveness as long-term and sustainable recovery measures.
During the 6 months of the Hungarian Presidency, the European Commission (EC) will be preparing its proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) which will determine the annual EU budgets from 2014 to 2020. The Hungarian Presidency plans to follow this process closely.
In its Presidency Programme, Hungary declares that innovation will play a central role for achieving its goals. Hungary has set its priorities for research and innovation on bringing to conclusion concrete steps by the EC for the simplification of FP7. With one eye on the simplification process of FP7 and one eye on the preparation of the next Framework Programme (FP8), the Hungarian Presidency wishes to focus on finding synergies between different instruments. At the EU Competitiveness Council in November 2010, European research ministers produced a set of detailed conclusions regarding the implementation of the Innovation Union strategy. One of the challenges for the
Hungarian Presidency will be to oversee the realization of the Council conclusions by the EC. The agenda on education for the first 6 months of 2011 includes achieving a **reduction in early school-leaving** and an increase in 30 to 34 year-olds completing third level education. Hungary has also pledged to continue the efforts started by the Belgian Presidency on vocational training, with special attention placed on enhancing the attractiveness and relevance of vocational training and bearing in mind the needs of the labour market. Other priorities for education are: focusing on student mobility and on the links between education and employability; contributing to the modernisation of higher education; and improving university governance. Hungary has announced that it plans to contribute to the adoption of the **first seven-year Strategic Innovation Agenda** of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) before the summer.

Several conferences on EU research and innovation topics will be hosted by Hungary. Among others, the European Future Technologies Conference will be held in Budapest on 4-6 May, at which the FET Flagship pilots will be announced. A conference on FP7 space research will be held in Budapest on 12-13 May. Over all, the programme and priorities of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU will **focus more on continuity of the previous Presidencies rather than introducing radical new initiatives**. Nevertheless, some important dossiers in the Research and Innovation domain will have to be tackled by the EU institutions, Member States and the public and private sectors during the first semester of 2011: the public consultation on the next Framework Programme, putting in place a single EU patent, advancing with the second batch of Joint Programming Initiatives to name just a few.

**RESEARCH**

**New measures to reduce red tape for FP7 projects**

On 24 January 2011, the European Commission (EC) adopted three concrete measures to help **reduce the administrative burden in the management of FP7 projects**. The intention to adopt these measures had been announced in the EC Communication on Simplifying the Implementation of the Research Framework Programmes as early as April 2010. The three concrete measures are:

- Beneficiaries can apply their usual accounting methods for reimbursements of their average personnel costs.
- SME owners who do not pay themselves a salary or whose salary is not formally registered in their accounts can be reimbursed through a flat-rate payment for the work they do on a FP7 research project.
- A new steering group charged with removing inconsistencies in the application of rules.

With the adoption of these measures the EC partly responds to the
recommendations of the interim evaluation of FP7 by an independent expert group in November 2010 (see Synopsis 2010/10), and to a resolution of the European Parliament (EP) as well as to various stakeholder position papers and the recommendations of an informal ministerial expert group on simplification. In light of everything that rests to be done in terms of simplification, the three measures announced are a rather small step, albeit one in the right direction.

The use of usual accounting methods for the reimbursement of average personnel costs for instance means that grant holders can now group personnel in categories based on objective criteria and calculate an average rate based on the average salary of each category. This allows charging personnel costs to the projects by multiplying the average rate by the hours dedicated under each category of employees. For large beneficiaries, where each category contains many researchers, this method can mean a simplification in the calculation of costs, especially for large beneficiaries.

The flat-rate for SME owners will be based on an existing system of flat-rate allowances already applied in the Marie Curie research grant scheme. The hourly flat-rate for a researcher will mainly depend on his/her experience and country of residence. For beneficiaries already familiar with the Marie Curie schemes this will mean a simplification. It remains to be seen whether others will profit as well.

These changes are measures which did not require changes to EU legislation and could therefore be enacted relatively quickly by the EC. Despite being rather small and technical, the changes could nevertheless have a positive impact on the administration of projects and reduce red tape. The Model Grant Agreement has been adapted accordingly.

In an explanatory memo, the EC states that the changes are effective immediately and in most cases can be applied retroactively to ongoing FP7 projects. The EC announced that these will probably be the last significant changes to be adopted under FP7. All further simplification measures will be prepared for the next Framework Programme. However, one further change – the long awaited removal of the requirement for beneficiaries to hold interest-bearing bank accounts – could still be implemented. According to the EC, this will depend on the outcome of the ongoing procedure to revise the EU Financial Regulation by the European Parliament and the EU Council. According to other sources however, a different interpretation of the existing EU Financial Regulation by the EC would have been enough and much faster.

The memo related to the changes
The new version of annex II of the Model Grant Agreement

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**20 ERC Advanced Grants at Swiss Host Institutions**

The European Research Council (ERC) published the results of the 2010 call for Advanced Grants (AdG) on 20 January 2011. The ERC received 2'009 applications in response of the call issued in early 2010 – an increase of 26% compared to the previous call. A total of 266 applications have been selected and awarded grants worth a total of around €590 million. This represents an overall success rate of 13%. Ranked by the number of institutions hosting grantees, the UK (53), Germany (45) and France (31) are the most successful countries in this call. **Switzerland is ranked 4th with 21 grants** (including 1 at CERN). The number of grants in Switzerland is somewhat lower than in last year’s AdG call (29 grants in 2009). Switzerland now hosts a total of 78 AdGs from the 3 calls
that have been issued so far since 2008. A positive development from a European perspective is that in this call some of the smaller countries – and especially some new EU Member States – have managed to improve their previous performances.

**ERC AdG per country of Host Institution**

Source: ERC

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<th>AdG 2008</th>
<th>AdG 2009</th>
<th>AdG 2010</th>
<th>Total</th>
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The grantees at Swiss Host Institutions come mainly from the areas of Physical Sciences/Engineering and Life Sciences, while the Social Sciences and Humanities are still strongly underrepresented. Of the 21 grants, 10 are for projects in Physical Sciences and Engineering, 10 are in the area of Life Sciences and only 1 in the Social Sciences and Humanities. Also, there is a significant gender difference: only 1 of the 21 grantees at Swiss institutions is a female researcher. This quota of less than 5% is below the average female quota in the whole 2010 AdG, which is at 9.4%. Both figures show potential for improvement.

Of the 21 grants for Switzerland, 13 go to the Federal Institutes of Technology (7 to ETHZ, 6 to EPFL). The Universities of Basel, Lausanne and Zurich received 2 grants each and the University of Geneva hosts 1 grant. The remaining grant hosted by CERN has been attributed to Switzerland in the ERC statistics, although it is formally not a Swiss institution. Among the 21 grantees, 10 are of Swiss nationality (there were 9 Swiss nationals in the previous call last year) staying in Switzerland; 8 are European nationals that were already conducting research in Switzerland; 2 are researchers of non-European nationality already working in Switzerland; and 1 is a researcher newly moving to Switzerland.

**Resource-efficient Europe Flagship Initiative launched**

The last Flagship Initiative of the Europe 2020 strategy (see Synopsis 2010/2) was launched by the European Commission (EC) on 26 January 2011. The Initiative with the name “Resource-efficient Europe” is a strategic policy framework that aims at establishing resource efficiency as the guiding principle for EU policies on energy, transport, climate change, industry, agriculture, commodities, fisheries and biodiversity. It should also help use more synergies between the different EU policy areas and reaching various EU targets. Among others, the goals listed by the EC to be achieved with the help of this Flagship Initiative are: contribute to the reduction of green house gases by 80 to 95% by 2050, reforming the agricultural and fisheries sector, reducing food waste, etc.
insecurity in developing countries and making Europe less vulnerable to fluctuating energy and commodity prices. The initiative foresees some concrete steps to be taken in 2011, including: a low carbon economy roadmap for 2050, a 2020 energy efficiency plan, a White Paper on the future of transport and a new strategy for biodiversity. Considering its scope and focus, this policy framework should also have an impact on EU research and innovation programmes. Calls for research towards new technologies that contribute to the goals will be influenced by this policy framework. At the same time, together with the other 6 flagship initiatives, the Resource-efficient Europe Initiative will help define the societal challenges that will be the focus of future EU research and innovation Framework Programmes. The Flagship Initiative should have an impact especially in the research areas of environment, raw materials, energy, transport, manufacturing and agriculture and on new technologies.

More about the new Flagship Initiative

Open Access Infrastructure for Research in Europe

On 2 December 2010, the European Commission launched the pilot project OpenAIRE (Open Access Infrastructure for Research in Europe). The three-year project aims at encouraging and supporting free online access to knowledge generated by researchers with grants from FP7 and the European Research Council (ERC). OpenAIRE is coordinated by the University of Athens in Greece and it involves 38 partners as well as €4.17 million to build support structures for researchers, set up and run an electronic infrastructure for handling peer-reviewed articles, and cooperate with communities to deposit, access and manage research datasets. Helpdesks in 27 countries across Europe should support researchers in making their articles available online, especially in the fields of health, energy, environment, information and communication technology (ICT), social science and humanities. The European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), based in Switzerland, is one of the 38 partners of OpenAIRE. The infrastructure also helps in devising new methods of indexing, annotating, ordering and linking documents and results. In this way, OpenAIRE could eventually open up access to all scientific papers and data produced by researchers funded by FP7. According to Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, the tool might not only be useful for scientists, but also industry, not least SMEs, which need to know where to find research results.

More about OpenAIRE

Report of the High-Level Group on Joint Programming

The High-Level Group on Joint Programming to the Council (GPC), established two years ago by the European Research Area Committee (ERAC, formerly CREST), has published its first report, called “Joint Programming in research 2008-2010 and beyond”. The document’s main content are the identification of themes for Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) as well as the development of voluntary guidelines for the Framework Conditions. The report describes the processes for selection of JPIs and the results of these processes. It highlights the importance of the very pragmatic, top-down approach, in order to maintain the momentum of the Joint Programming process. Concerning the voluntary guidelines, the GPC reports that significant progress has been made by establishing the 2010 version and it strongly recommends using them. The GPC notes that different ways to involve industry more closely in the Joint Programming process should be considered. This has been limited
to date, because of the difficulty in identifying groups representing the interests of the wider European industry base.

Overall the GPC believes that Joint Programming continues to have the potential to bring major benefits. It reports, as all nine JPIs are now either in planning or moving to an operational phase, their success will largely depend on the real level of commitment of the participating countries, as well as an adequate governance structure which generates trust, a shared common vision and a strategic research agenda.

The full report (pdf)

New report on INCO BILATs

At the end of 2010, the European Commission published a new report on the International Cooperation Bilateral projects. The brochure is named "Reinforcing Strategic Partnerships – International Cooperation BILAT projects, Call 2009" and presents the activities of six BILAT projects which have been selected following the evaluation of the call for proposals published in June 2009. The projects aim at developing and enhancing S&T Partnerships with Third Countries which have signed or are in the process of negotiating an EU S&T cooperation agreement. The countries targeted in these projects are Argentina, Egypt, Japan, Jordan and the USA.

The full report (pdf)

Mid-term review of Galileo and EGNOS

The European satellite navigation programmes Galileo and EGNOS (European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service) have undergone a mid-term review by the European Commission (EC). The review was presented by the EC on 18 January 2011 and takes stock of the progress made by the two programmes so far and sets out the challenges ahead. The ultimate goal of a European satellite navigation system is to achieve autonomy with respect to the systems of the USA and Russia and provide satellite navigation services optimised for civil use. The 2007 governance reform put a stop to the public-private partnership negotiations and reaffirmed the need for full public-sector financing and risk management. The 2007 reform entrusted the ownership to the EU and made the EC responsible for managing both programmes.

The mid-term review by the EC highlights the positive developments of the two programmes but also acknowledges the difficulties currently facing them. The three main areas of concern for the EC are: the significant cost over-runs, the uncertainty about future funding and the probable delays in delivery that arise from the first two points.

The cost-overruns for Galileo alone represent around €1 billion (€500 million in the development phase and another €500 million in the deployment phase mainly due to additional launch costs). Galileo’s Full Operational Capability (FOC) should be achieved in 2019-2020. This might change, depending on availability of financing, technical problems and industrial performance. Where EGNOS is concerned, development and maintenance requirements have resulted in excessive expenditure, while satisfactory geographical cover of the European zone has yet to be achieved. The EU contribution to the Galileo and EGNOS programmes for 2007-2013 amounts to €3,4 billion, in addition to which there is, inter alia, a contribution from Norway. This budget has been split across the three main activities, namely completion of the Galileo development phase (accounting for around €600 million), the Galileo deployment phase (€2.4 billion), and the operation of EGNOS (around €400 million). The contribution after 2013 is still uncertain, given that the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period of 2014 onwards has not been decided.

The full report (pdf)
New Organisation Chart of DG Research and Innovation

The new organisation chart of the Directorate General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission came into force on 1 January 2011. As expected (see Synopsis 2010/9) several units in charge of research and innovation, previously situated in different directorates have been merged into a new Directorate C for “Research and Innovation”. This Directorate is headed by Clara de la Torre. The new Directorate B “European Research Area”, headed by Octavio Quintana Trias, is also the result of merging different Directorates and now covers such areas as ERA policy, Mobility and Research careers, Joint Programming as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities. Jacques Metthey, former Director ad-interim of the European Research Council (ERC), now heads Directorate A “Framework Programme Inter-institutional Relations”. Units in this Directorate will have the lead in many aspects of the preparation of the next Framework Programme as well as in the simplification process. Regarding the latter, a new sector for the harmonized interpretation of rules and procedures and for coordination with other Directorates General has been called to life within Directorate A.

The new organisation chart (pdf)

INNOVATION

European Innovation Scoreboard 2010

The new edition of the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) contains some adaptations that will allow to monitor the progress of the EU policy outlined in the Innovation Union, one of the Flagship Initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy. Integrating the European Innovation Scoreboard more closely as a monitoring tool of the Innovation Union required the replacement of the former list of 29 indicators with a new list of 25 indicators which better capture the performance of national research and innovation systems considered as a whole. 17 of the previous 29 indicators have been carried over from last year’s edition and 8 new indicators have been introduced.

The EIS 2010 includes data and trend analyses for the EU27 Member States, as well as for Croatia, Iceland, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey.

Like in last year’s scoreboard, Switzerland belongs to the group of “Innovation leaders”, together with Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden and the UK. Switzerland is not only on the top of this group of most innovative countries, but also shows a growth performance close to 4%, which is above the average of EU27 Member States. Relative Swiss strengths are in “Open, excellent and attractive research systems”, “Intellectual assets”, “Innovators” and “Outputs”. Relative weaknesses are in “Finance and support” and “Linkages & entrepreneurship”. High growth is observed for “Venture capital”, “Community trademarks” and “Sales of new products”. A relatively strong decline is observed for “SMEs innovating in-house” and “Innovative SMEs collaborating with others”.

The EIS includes comparisons with the US (as well as some other countries outside Europe). In 10 indicators, the US performs better than the EU27. However, in “Public R&D expenditure”, “Trademarks” and “Knowledge-intensive services exports” the EU27 is ahead. Overall, there is a clear performance lead in favor of the US. But the US innovation lead is very slowly declining, as its innovation performance has grown at an annual rate of 0.65% while the EU27 is growing at an annual rate of 0.73%. US
growth performance is stronger in “New doctorate degrees”, “Business R&D expenditure”, “Trademarks” and “License and patent revenues”.

The full EIS 2010 report (pdf)

Interim evaluation of AAL

A high-level panel, chaired by the former EU Commissioner Meglena Kuneva, presented on 16 December 2010 the interim evaluation report on Ambient Assisted Living (AAL), a joint programme of 23 EU Member States and associated countries according to Article 185 of the Functioning of the EU Treaty. AAL started in 2008 and funds innovative projects based on ICT technologies, to the benefit of older people, and to support the industry in Europe to become more competitive. After two calls combining budget from FP7 as well as national funding, approximately 40 R&D close-to-market projects with end-users involved have been supported. Another 20 AAL projects, from call 3, will be launched in the coming months. As a positive result of AAL, the interim evaluation report points out that SME participation is over 40% and the financial commitments of the participating States are above the originally committed level. The evaluation panel underlines the importance of finding a better mechanism for the exploitation of results stemming from AAL projects. The gap between results and market take-up is a concern to the panel. This concern is shared by the European Commission (EC), according to a report on AAL which the EC sent to the European Parliament and the Council. The Commission tries to tackle this general issue in its initiative to establish the pilot “European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing”, with a possible contribution of the AAL joint programme. This initiative aims, amongst others, at addressing the barriers to a large-scale market take-up of innovations in the area of quality of life and health challenges associated to demographic ageing (see Synopsis 2010/10). Based on the feedback from the European Parliament and the Council on the evaluation report and its associated report, the EC will initiate a process for the continuation of the AAL joint programme which will end in 2013.

The panel report (pdf)
The EC report on AAL to the Council and Parliament (pdf)
The new rules of participation for Swiss institutions

Public consultation on a possible EU Space Programme

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union gives the EU the possibility to take action in space policy which might even lead to the creation of an EU Space Programme. Apart from space research in FP7 the main activities of the EU have so far concentrated on the two flagship programmes GMES (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security) and Galileo. Further space action is currently being considered on two key challenges, namely the security of critical European space infrastructures (such as the protection of spacecrafts and satellites from objects in the orbit), and on the exploitation of the societal, economic and strategic benefits of space exploration.

DG Enterprise and Industry (DG ENTR) of the European Commission (EC) launched a public consultation on those two issues, addressing mainly space industry and public authorities. The consultation is part of an impact assessment on a possible EC proposal for an EU Space Programme.
EDUCATION

A bridge to the future

In 2002 the Copenhagen process was launched by the European Commission (EC), EU Member States, Associated and Candidate Countries and European social partners to strengthen European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET). The different parties agreed on, and committed themselves to common priorities. They developed common principles and instruments in order to define and categorize qualifications and to promote geographical mobility and flexibility in the VET systems. Cedefop has been entrusted with analysing and reporting on progress with biennial policy reports. At the end of 2010, the latest of these reports on the European policy for VET was launched. Under the title “A bridge to the future”, it was presented along with the Bruges communiqué at the ministerial meeting on 7 December 2010. Next to marking the transition towards the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Cedefop report evaluates the progress achieved in European policy-making in the field of VET between 2002 and 2010, the entire eight-year period of the Copenhagen process. The report particularly highlights the need for greater openness and transparency for VET systems to allow individuals at any age as well as disadvantaged persons better access to training. As part of a creative, innovative vision it wishes more opportunities for experience and training abroad in order to stimulate linguistic knowledge, self-confidence and knowledge for specific jobs. On participating countries the report calls to:

- Stimulate measures to encourage more people to take up VET
- Transpose the 2009 recommendations on quality assurance in VET
- Encourage the creation of professional schools, with the support of the local and regional authorities
- Introduce measures to promote international mobility
- Increase cooperation with the business world to confirm the relevance of VET
- Launch communication strategies for highlighting the benefits of professional training

Overall the report makes clear that VET is higher on the European policy agenda than ever before. Cedefop notes that one of the major achievements of European policy cooperation has been the development of common European instruments and principles to promote transparency and mobility for learning and working.

The full report (pdf)
Consultation on the modernization of higher education in Europe

The European Commission (EC) has launched a public consultation in order to help preparing the new Communication on the modernization of higher education in Europe which the EC plans to adopt in the third quarter of 2011. The new Communication will provide strategic direction for the development of European higher education in the next ten years, including the areas of education, research and innovation. The Communication will further review progress towards the objectives set in 2006.

The ongoing wide-ranging consultation invites stakeholders to complete a short online questionnaire, asking for their views on priorities for higher education, including its research and innovation dimensions, in the period up to 2020. The EC wants to give governments the opportunity to provide more qualitative inputs. Therefore it asks them to take position, ideally in around 3 pages, in particular based on the following questions:

- What are the key challenges that European higher education systems face today and how have these evolved in recent years?
- What are the biggest successes in European higher education reform?
- Which areas leave the most room for improvement?
- What priorities would you like to see included in a new EU strategy for higher education modernization and why?
- What specifically should the EU do to make this happen? Where can the EU add value?

The consultation is open until 15 March 2011 and can be answered in English, French or German.

Impact of the economic crisis on European higher education

Since its creation in 2008 the European University Association (EUA) has been monitoring the evolution of the economic crisis and its effect on higher education systems in Europe. After a series of short reports the association now published its latest update report. It highlights that the economic crisis continues to affect higher education in several ways. In a number of European countries funding has been decreased and often public authorities are also reviewing the way the funding is actually delivered to universities. Institutions in most European countries report future uncertainty and expect further cuts to higher education budgets. Often cuts are even likely to have a restructuring effect. In England a major shift from direct funding to institutions towards indirect funding through student support is underway. This is coupled with higher tuition fees and reduced teaching grants. In Italy funds will be made increasingly conditional on student employability and research performance. Only a few countries, like France or Germany, could uphold their commitment to increase public funding for higher education institutions. So far, no direct cuts or minor cuts only have been reported by the Nordic countries, including Switzerland. The latest EUA monitoring report will be part of a major new study on the financial sustainability of European higher education, containing information on how universities can diversify their income sources. It is currently being finalized and will be launched on 22 February 2011.

Public Consultation on the Professional Qualification Directive

On 7 January 2011 the European Commission (EC) services have launched a public consultation on the Professional Qualification Directive. Stakeholders have the opportunity to highlight areas of the Directive they feel could be simplified and made more user-friendly.

The Professional Qualification Directive covers more than 800 professions which Member States (MS)
regulate and which can be pursued only if certain professional qualifications have been acquired. It is the key for professionals to take full advantage of the potential of the Single Market in finding a job in another MS. The synergies between Bologna and the Qualification Directive were already raised by the EUA in October 2010 (see Synopsis 2010/9). The consultation focuses on three main challenges:
- Further Simplification for citizens
- Option of a European Professional Card
- How to increase awareness on EU legislation in this area

The consultation is open until 15 March 2011 and a public hearing is scheduled for 21 February 2011. The results of the consultation will feed into an evaluation report and a Green Paper due this autumn. In 2012 the EC should come forward with a proposal for modernizing the Directive.

Next Business-Academia Forum

There are many examples of successful cooperation between academia and industry throughout Europe which show that both higher education institutions and businesses benefit from working together. On 22-23 March 2011, the next University-Business Forum will take place in Brussels. The event is the fourth in a series of annual Business-Academia meetings. It will follow a similar structure as in the past, with plenary sessions in the mornings and three parallel streams in the afternoon. Thematically, the forum will relate to the Europe 2020 strategy, in particular to the Flagship Initiatives “Youth on the Move”, “Innovation Union” and “Agenda for new Skills and Jobs”. More than 400 representatives from Higher Education, Business, NGOs and Public Authorities are expected to attend the event. For choosing them the organizers, as usual, tries to consider criteria such as good geographical coverage, good balance between representatives from Academia and from Business as well as good gender balance.

More about the consultation

More information about the Forum
Change of management at SwissCore

On 1 March 2011, Maryline Maillard, Head of Office since February 2007, will leave SwissCore to work for the University of Fribourg. There, she will support and coordinate the acquisition of third-party funds for the research activities of the institution and, in this position, she will remain in close contact with the Swiss National Science Foundation and Euresearch while promoting national and European grants.

Her successor David Bohmert started on 1 February 2011. David was born and raised in Zurich. After his federal Matura he left Switzerland and studied public administration at the University of Amsterdam. Later he worked at the same institution as liaison and technology transfer officer, development researcher for fundraising and coordinator of relations. Prior to coming to Brussels, David was policy advisor international affairs at the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU). He arrived in Brussels in 2006, where he contributed as senior policy specialist with managerial responsibilities to setting-up the Netherlands house for Education and Research (Neth-ER). We address our warm welcome to David.

We thank Maryline for her outstanding work at SwissCore. During the 4 years as Head of Office her dedication to the Swiss research community was a substantial contribution to Switzerland’s participation in the European research programmes. With her active and valued participation in the IGLO network she leaves a profound mark in Brussels, as well as many friends. We all wish her lots of success for her new position in Fribourg.

The new SwissCore team (left to right): Monika Stach, Stephan Kuster, David Bohmert, André Odermatt and Katelijne Kenis.