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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EU POLICY	2
Irish Presidency Announces Research and Innovation Priorities.....	2
European Council Meeting in Brussels	2
EC Criticises Member States over Lisbon.....	3
ERC Expert Group Final Report.....	3
EC Communication on Basic Research	4
ECB Concerned over Lack of Progress on Lisbon.....	4
New EU Agencies	4
Opinions Sought on FP6 New Instruments	5
Structural Funds Strategy for New Member States.....	5
Irish Presidency Schedule on Public Health	6
New EC Directors-General.....	6
Towards a Security Research Programme	7
World Information Summit.....	7
New Hydrogen Economy Technology Platform	7
€500 million to Support EU Climate Change Policy	8
Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion	8
End of European Year of People with Disabilities.....	9
RESEARCH NEWS	9
New Genetic Diversity Programme	9
EC Project on Repairing Inner Ear Damage	10
New In-Car Crash Response System	10
European Photovoltaic Research.....	10
New Baltic Collaboration on Sustainable Development	11
EC Project is a Breath of Fresh Air	11
EDUCATION, TRAINING AND CULTURE	12
Irish Presidency Highlights Role of Education in Lisbon Strategy.....	12
Council Meeting - Education, Youth and Culture	12
Culture 2000 Programme.....	13
EXTERNAL COLLABORATION	13
Western Balkans and Pre-Accession Programmes	14
Reinforced Co-operation with China	14
Euro-Indian Co-operation in ICT	14
EVENTS and AWARDS.....	15
JRC and Development of the ERA – Information Day	15
Third European Business Summit – Research and Innovation.....	15
NEW PUBLICATIONS and ON-LINE RESOURCES	16
"EUROPA" is Re-born.....	16
New Website on the Bologna Process.....	16
New CORDIS FP6 Projects Service	16
Eureka and the ERA	16
EC Report on Human Tissue Engineering Potential.....	17
New Brochure on Freedom, Security and Justice in the EU	17
CORDIS	18

IGLO Project Search	18
EUR-LEX (Official Journal C and L).....	18
EUROPA.....	18
RAPID	19
GLOSSARY	19

EU POLICY

Irish Presidency announces Research and Innovation Priorities

The Irish government has announced that raising research investment, facilitating discussions on excellence in basic research and developing an effective European space policy will be among its priorities during its six month Presidency of the EU. The Presidency will seek to promote the development and implementation of a workable open method of co-ordination in order to achieve the 2010 objectives.

Ireland will continue the work of the Council on supporting the establishment of pan-European eGovernment services. The mid-term review of the eEurope Action Plan, to be conducted during the Irish Presidency, will reflect the opportunities of enlargement and highlight the benefits of broadband across the EU. To this end, the Hungarian Government, with the support of the Irish Presidency, will host a European ministerial meeting on the information society in Budapest. The Irish government also intends to continue work initiated under the Italian Presidency on the proposal for a regulation on chemicals, with a view to achieving an effective balance between economic, social and environmental considerations.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Work programme of the Irish Presidency, available at:

<http://www.eu2004.ie/templates/standard.asp?sNavlocator=5,11,153>

European Council meeting in Brussels

The European Council met in Brussels 12 December 2003. This meeting, which was meant to finalise a Constitution for the Union, failed to agree over the voting power of Member States in the Council. No agreement was reached on the limits to areas covered by Qualified Majority Voting or its actual definition.

The meeting was not altogether unsuccessful as EU leaders agreed on the composition of the EC, namely to retain the one Commissioner per country principle, to increase the minimum number of seats in the EP to five, to not re-open discussions on issues already agreed in past negotiations, to endorse European Action for Growth through immaterial investments in trans-European network infrastructure (TENs) including transport, telecommunications and energy, innovation and research and development including environmental technology.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Presidency Conclusions on the meeting, available at:

<http://ue.eu.int/newsroom/LoadDoc.asp?MAX=1&BID=76&DID=78364&LANG=1>

EC criticises Member States over Lisbon

The EC hopes that its annual Spring Report on the progress towards the Lisbon goals (creating the world's most innovative knowledge-based society by 2010) will act as a wake up call to governments and generate the political will to improve EU competitiveness. The Spring report highlights several areas for concern; overall a dire picture of EU competitiveness, slow progress on job creation targets, employment, productivity, over 40 per cent of legislation still needing to be transposed to internal market directives and budgetary situations of Member States such as France and Germany.

The report comes in preparation for the Spring Summit 2004, which will take place 25-26 March in Brussels. The EC has also urged action in three priority areas. Firstly, attention must be given to investment in networks and knowledge under the "European Growth Initiative" and the three per cent objective. The second area is an increase in efforts in the areas of industrial policy, the services market and environmental technologies and the third increased support for labour market participation of older people.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC Press Release number IP/04/74 of 21 January 2004, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesren.ksh>

Implementation Report of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines 2003-2005, available at:

<http://ue.eu.int/emu/broad/2003/Econ.Pol.2003EN.pdf>

Joint Employment Report, available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/employment_strategy/employ_en.htm

Implementation Report on the Internal Market Strategy, available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/update/strategy

ERC Expert Group final report

Further to the article in the last issue (EI 04:01), the European Research Council Expert Group (ERCEG) has published its final report on the desirability of an European Research Council (ERC). In the report, the Group recommends that the EU should establish a European Fund for Research Excellence. This fund, the group suggests, should be no less than € 2 billion a year for the first three to five years and managed by a European Research Council. The first and main task for the ERC should be to support investigator-driven research of the highest quality selected through European competition.

The group recommends that the ERC should primarily be a funding body for basic research and should cover all fields of science, including the social sciences and humanities, using a flexible approach suited to the various fields of research. It should base its funding decisions on scientific criteria and use a rigorous and transparent peer review process in deciding which research proposals to fund. It should encourage interdisciplinary and risk-taking projects, especially in emerging research areas. Little detail is given on how the ERC would help to achieve the ambitious goals of closing the gap with the US and how the ERC would address existing areas of concern.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

ERCEG Final Report , available at:

http://www.ercexpertgroup.org/documents/ercexpertgroup_final_report.pdf

EC Communication on basic research

The communication seeks to analyse the current status of basic research in both Europe and the US, and suggests that while the two partners display roughly the same level of commitment, Europe lags significantly behind the US in relation to scientific journal references. This, the EC argues, is evidence of the lower overall impact and quality of European research, which is itself presumed to be the direct result of a lack of competition within Europe.

Having made the argument that the situation calls for a European response, the communication argues that an EU support mechanism for individual research projects should be introduced, modelled on the US National Science Foundation's "individual grants" scheme. This principle could equally be exported to more applied research (i.e., the Framework Programme itself). The Communication also suggests a timetable for the political debate on European support for basic research. Following the conclusion of the debate within the institutions and the wider scientific community within the first quarter of 2004, the EC will submit a second communication during the second quarter aimed at translating those conclusions into structures and mechanisms. The process of reaching a political agreement on these proposals will begin in the second half of 2004, under the Dutch Presidency, with a view to establishing the proposals in time for the Seventh Framework Programme.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC communication "Europe and basic research", available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/press/2004/pdf/acte_en_version_final_15janv_04.pdf

ECB concerned over lack of progress on Lisbon

Reporting to the EP Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, Mr Otmar Issing, a Member of the Executive Board of the European Central Bank (ECB), expressed the ECB's concern at the lack of progress on the Lisbon agenda.

Mr Issing blamed this failure on the slow pace of structural reforms, both in the product and labour markets, which led to a lack of flexibility in the economy, and the insufficient investment in research, which was still well short of the target of three per cent of GDP. "There is too little momentum in the implementation of structural reforms in the euro area", he told MEPs. However, efforts to make structural reforms should be accompanied by "a qualitative improvement" in public expenditure, with more focus on investment in physical and human capital.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EP Press Release, available at:

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/sipade2?PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+PRESS+NR-20040120-1+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&LEVEL=2&NAV=S#SECTION1>

New EU Agencies

Concluding years of political wrangling, EU leaders have reached agreement on the distribution of new EU agencies. The agreement on the allocation of the new EU agencies, reached by common accord 13 December 2003, complements the decisions taken in Edinburgh 12 December 1992 and in Brussels 29 October 1993. The new offices and agencies will enable the EU to further its activities in the Food Safety, Aviation

Security, Network and Information Security, Chemicals, Railway, Disease Prevention and Control, Judicial and Police Co-operation, as well as Maritime Safety sectors.

Under the agreement, the agencies and research institutions will be distributed as follows:

- Britain (London) - European Police College (CEPOL)
- Denmark (Copenhagen) - European Environment Agency
- Finland (Helsinki) - European Chemicals Agency
- France (Lille/Valenciennes) - European Railway Agency
- Germany (Cologne) - European Aviation Safety Agency
- Greece – European Network and Information Security Agency
- Italy (Parma) - European Food Safety Agency (EFSA)
- Netherlands (The Hague) – Eurojust
- Portugal (Lisbon) - European Maritime Safety Agency
- Sweden - European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Council Decision, available at:

<http://ue.eu.int/pressData/en/misc/78398.pdf>

Opinions sought on FP6 New Instruments

The high-level expert panel carrying out the mid-term review of the new instruments - the Marimon group - is seeking to encourage participants in the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) to share their views on the programme's new instruments, namely the Networks of Excellence and Integrated Projects. To this end, it has prepared a questionnaire that will be sent to all successful and unsuccessful applicants for the FP6 New Instruments.

Comments related to the objectives of the FP6 New Instruments, as well as their foreseen implementation modalities, would be much appreciated. A copy of the questionnaire, for information purposes only, has been made available on the CORDIS web site. Researchers and administrators who have not submitted an application under FP6, but would nonetheless like to communicate their views on the New Instruments to the Panel are invited to send their comments directly to the Panel's rapporteur, Mr Alain Denis as per the contact details on the questionnaire.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

The sample questionnaire is available at:

<ftp://ftp.cordis.lu/pub/fp6/docs/questionnaire-instruments.pdf>

Structural Funds Strategy for New Member States

The EC has concluded its negotiations on the strategy for the implementation of structural funds in the ten new Member States for the period 2004/06. The agreements on the strategy for the implementation of Structural Funds reached 18 December 2003 spells out the priorities for economic and social development strategy for the ten new Member States that will be supported with community funding over the next two years. For the period between 2004 and 2006, a € 22 billion purse has been earmarked for all structural instruments in the new Member States.

Under the Treaty of Accession, the new Member States may benefit from the eligibility of expenditure under Structural Funds as of 1 January 2004, provided that all related

conditions are fulfilled. The relevant programming documents will be formally approved on 1 May 2004. The Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund account for about one third of the EU budget (roughly €36 billion in 2004).

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC website on regional policy, available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/index_en.htm

Irish Presidency Schedule on Public Health

The Irish Presidency is scheduled to oversee the completion of the pharmaceuticals review, legislation on the safety of handling human tissues and cells, the introduction of the European Health Insurance Card and the launch of the review of the medical devices directives. The Irish Presidency has decided to give special attention to the fight against cardiovascular diseases. The Council currently has two items to consider now that the EP has examined them; the legislative package on EU pharmaceutical legislation and the proposed directive on human tissue and cells. The Irish Presidency's programme foresees a new proposal for a Directive on human tissue engineered products. A new legislative proposal on the review of the Medical Devices Directives is also expected during the six-month term of the Irish Presidency.

Following up on the final report of the high-level expert group on patient mobility, the EC is expected to issue a Communication. The Presidency intends to raise this issue at the informal health ministers' meeting to be held in Cork 12 May, ahead of the Health Council in June 2004. The Presidency is scheduled to hold a conference on eHealth on 5-6 May in Cork. The themes to be discussed at the conference include health cards, integrated care records, clinical excellence, health portals and telemedicine.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council report, available at:

http://www.eu2004.ie/templates/document_file.asp?id=2351

New EC Directors-General

The EC has appointed Robert Madelin as Director General for Health and Consumer Protection and Marco Benedetti as the new Director General for Interpretation. One of the main tasks of the Director General for Interpretation will be to ensure that the newly created DG absorbs the extra workload created by enlargement efficiently and effectively, and develops co-operation with the interpretation services of the EP and the Court of Justice.

The Director General for Health and Consumer Protection will head a team of around 700 people. He will be responsible for policy on public health and for the protection of EU consumers' health, safety and economic interests.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC Press Release number IP/03/1743 of 16 December 2003, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cji/guesten.ksh>

Towards a Security Research Programme

The EC has outlined the structure of the proposed preparatory action on security research. The ultimate aim of the action is to develop a long-term vision and strategic agenda for security related research. Without a coherent European approach, as a whole, EU Member States invest around half the amount of the US in defence, while only achieving one fifth of their capabilities according the EC.

As well as identifying a strategic agenda for security research, the preparatory action will directly support a limited number of targeted projects that will build on research already undertaken at European, national and intergovernmental level. The EC has proposed a budget of €15 million for the action, which the EP is expected to vote on in early 2004. For this initial phase, five security priority areas have been identified: improving situation awareness, optimising security and protection of networked systems, protecting against terrorism, enhancing crisis management, achieving interoperability and integrated systems for information and communication.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC defence website, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/defence>

EC Press Release number SPEECH/04/01, available at

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh>

World Information Summit

The World Summit on the Information Society has finished with agreement on the broad objectives but little in the way of specific action to attain them. The 29 point plan of action states that by 2015, half of the world's population should be connected to the Internet but without giving details on the means to achieve this objective. The two most controversial issues - setting a digital solidarity fund that would allow poor countries access to ICT and regulating the Internet - were left for a UN committee to report to the second stage of the summit in November 2005.

Commissioner Liikanen said he was sceptical about setting up a digital solidarity fund, questioning results delivered, fear of establishing monopolies who fix prices and knock-on effects of this. While the Declaration of Principles establishes objectives of improved accessibility of information society, and freedom of expression, most participants agreed that the real benefit of the summit was the pressure it exerted on governments to push the Information Society up their agendas.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, available at:

http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsis/doc/S03-WSIS-DOC-0004!!MSW-E.doc

New Hydrogen Economy Technology Platform

The EC has launched the new "European Hydrogen and Fuel Cell" Technology Platform, whose Advisory Council includes key players of the European hydrogen sector. As one of the first examples of the Technology Platforms suggested by the EC for FP7, this TP is charged with drafting a blueprint to smooth the EU transition from a fossil fuel-based to a hydrogen-based economy. Its Advisory Council is chaired by Jeremy Bentham, CEO of

Shell Hydrogen, and comprises 35 members representing the relevant industrial, governmental and other stakeholders, all distinguished by their leadership in the field.

The setting up of the platform responds to the EC belief that the EU effort in developing and consolidating hydrogen technology is fragmented and spread across a number of member states, often with overlapping activities. The Platform will seek to build consensus and drive forward a coherent European research and deployment strategy in the hydrogen and fuel cell sector, including public-private partnerships, lighthouse projects, standards and regulations. In so doing, it is hoped it will build a critical mass and rally stakeholders to make Europe a leading player and a stronger partner at the international level.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Technology Platform overview, available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/energy/nn/nn_rt_htp1_en.html

€500 million to support EU Climate Change Policy

On 11 December Margot Wallström, European Commissioner for the Environment, and Philippe Maystadt, President of the European Investment Bank, presented the Bank's planned initiatives to help to bring about a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in support of EU Emissions Trading Scheme. The new initiatives will be mainly implemented through project financing activities, both inside and outside the EU.

The EIB proposal includes a dedicated financing facility of €500 million, over two to three years chiefly for project support to promoters participating in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme and seeking to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. A technical assistance facility would provide conditional grant finance to help identify, prepare and market Joint Implementation and the Clean Development Mechanism project-related carbon credits, in transition and developing countries respectively. The EIB is also exploring the potential for EIB participation in a carbon equity-type facility.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC Press Release number IP/03/1714 of 11 December 2003, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cqi/questen.ksh>

Tackling poverty and social exclusion

In a new communication published 17 December 2003, the EC maintains that tackling poverty and social exclusion are still high on the political agenda. The latest version of National Action Plans (NAPs) as created by Member States for 2003/05, are examined in detail in the Draft Joint Report on Social Inclusion. While in percentage terms the proportion of EU society at risk to poverty has dropped, there are still huge numbers at risk. The EC underlined the goal of mutually reinforcing strategies in Member States and seeks to implement social inclusion goals in all relevant areas of EU policy.

Also discussed in the report are the disparities across Europe, and how new risks have also emerged such as the impact on the workforce of rapid technological change and the growing numbers of young people leaving school without appropriate skills. The EC has also recommended six distinct two to three year policy objectives, including promotion of labour market investment, widening access to social protection schemes, tackling early school leaving and reducing poverty.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC Press Release number IP/03/1749 of 17 December 2003, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cqi/questen.ksh>

Q&As on social inclusion: EC memo number MEMO/03/259 of 17 December 2003, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cqi/questen.ksh>

Full EC communication, available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/joint_rep_en.htm

End of European Year of People with Disabilities

At the end of 2003, European Ombudsman, P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, has opened an own-initiative investigation into the integration of people with disabilities. At this stage, the Ombudsman has decided to limit the scope of his inquiry to the EC, in view of its central institutional role within the EU. The Ombudsman will investigate what measures have been taken to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against in their relations with the institution. He has therefore asked the EC to inform him by 29 February 2004 of EC actions taken or planned to tackle discrimination and their timetable.

To ensure that interested parties have the possibility to make their views known, the Ombudsman will be informing relevant governmental and non-governmental organisations of his own initiative inquiry and will be publishing all relevant documents in a specially-created section of his website referenced below.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

European Ombudsman initiative number EO/03/25 of 16 December 2003, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cqi/questen.ksh>

Ombudsman's site, available at:

<http://www.euro-ombudsman.eu.int/disabilities/en/default.htm>

RESEARCH NEWS

New Genetic Diversity Programme

The EC has adopted a proposal for a second EU programme for the conservation, characterisation, collection and use of genetic resources in agriculture. The €10 million programme will seek to promote genetic diversity within plant, animal and microbial genetic resources with regard to the sustainable development of agricultural production and rural areas.

The new programme is based on a 1994 Council Regulation which underpinned a previous 5 year programme that ended in December 1999. The first programme saw 21 projects funded to the value of €10 million.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC Press Release number IP/03/1807, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cqi/quesren.ksh>

EC Project on repairing inner ear damage

The four year BIONIC EAR project is supported under the FP5 scheme, with an allocated budget of €1.53 million. The project has received widespread recognition for its pioneering work on inner ear damage, particularly ways of repairing damaged hair cells, which may have suffered from trauma, anti-biotics treatments or ageing. The EC was particularly pleased that the project should have received top class recognition in the US at the annual meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB), and that the project would help treat the one in ten Europeans who become deaf as a result of inner ear damage.

It was previously considered that damaged inner ear cells could not be replaced, but the group has identified stem cells in mice which might be used to create new sensory hair cells, if further research can prove this approach to be efficient. The group has also investigated a combination of cell therapy and cochlear implants to electronically stimulate inner ear cells.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

CORDIS Project Service fact sheet on BIONIC EAR, available at:

http://dbs.cordis.lu/fep-cgi/srchidadb?ACTION=D&SESSION=52712004-1-28&DOC=1&TBL=EN_PROJ&RCN=EP_RCN_A:54603&CALLER=PROJ_FP5

New in-car crash response system

A group of European researchers, funded under the EC FP5 programme have developed a new "E-merge" in-car system which can automatically sense when a car has crashed, alert emergency services to the location, identity of the car and severity of the incident. The small device placed under the dashboard of the car, reads data from the airbag sensor to determine severity of a crash and transmits information immediately to the emergency services, automatically adapting to the language of the country where the accident has taken place. Those inside the car can even communicate, if they are able, via a speaker and microphone.

With tests underway in five countries across Europe, and promising early results, the project co-ordinator, Michael Nielsen, hopes that if EU member states are willing to fund necessary infrastructure, the system may be up and running in 2008. The development is timely for the EC as it look for ways to reach its target of halving 40,000 road deaths in Europe by 2010. One initial study estimates that the E-merge system could save as many as 6,000 lives out of the above total each year.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

IST Project fact sheet, available at:

http://dbs.cordis.lu/fep-cgi/srchidadb?ACTION=D&CALLER=PROJ_IST&QM_EP_RCN_A=61501

European photovoltaic research

The EC has undertaken an overview of EU funded research on photovoltaic energy, and called on researchers and entrepreneurs to enhance co-operation and to drive forward the development of this promising source of energy. Also known as solar cells, photovoltaic cell generation has expanded steadily over the past ten years, recording an average of 30 per cent annual growth. Worldwide production of photovoltaic modules

exceeded 550 MW in 2002, with more than 25 per cent of these being produced in Europe.

The need for a strategic development of photovoltaic (PV) systems in Europe led to the foundation of PV-NET, a network which brought together representatives of all relevant research and development (R&D) and production areas in photovoltaics. The network encouraged increased communication between PV stakeholders through the organisation of expert meetings, workshops and symposia. This interaction resulted in the drafting of a PV roadmap, concluded at the end of 2003, which covered all technological, institutional and developmental areas. The roadmap is designed to give national and European decision makers a sound basis for their decisions and promote the achievement of the EC target of a 30-fold increase in PV systems by the year 2010. The EC overview offers a snapshot of the current state of European PV research and development.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC overview, available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/energy/pdf/european_photovoltaics_en.pdf

New Baltic collaboration on sustainable development

A new project to be funded under the FP6 ERA-NET scheme will mean closer collaboration of eight of the nine countries bordering the Baltic Sea as well as the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES). The EC will contribute €3.03 million to the BONUS project. The project aims to co-ordinate approaches to research on issues such as pollution, regional development, marine sciences and conservation of natural resources. The EC hopes that the project will meet the needs of policy makers, with a more effective implementation of resources and effort, as well as those of the Baltic region's economy and citizens.

This is the first project of its kind in the Baltic, and is timely as recent problems of pollution and fishing rights demand transnational attention of a strategic nature. It is expected that efforts under the BONUS network will lead to closer collaboration still, with joint funding for shared research programmes, wider access to facilities and the establishment of a joint postgraduate training programme.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

CORDIS website on the ERA-NET scheme, available at:

<http://www.cordis.lu/coordination/home.html>

EC Project is a breath of fresh air

A project funded under FP5 has introduced a new system combining nature and technology to reduce unpleasant liquid waste emissions by 95 per cent. The EMRED project team includes SMEs and research institutes from across Europe and has focused on the problems of affordable treatment of wastewater storage tanks and basins to reduce emissions.

Using water plants and filter materials for the open tanks and ponds, initial tests have seen a reduction in emissions of 95 per cent. While work on how best to position the materials continues at several European sites, the research offers a solution to SMEs and other small groups who are unable to afford high-tech wastewater treatment facilities. The

range of partners, from research institutes to food manufacturers, means that the outcomes are focused on market needs. The project is due to finish in October 2004.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

CORDIS Project Service fact sheet on EMRED, available at:

http://dbs.cordis.lu/fep-cgi/srchidadb?ACTION=D&SESSION=2922004-1-28&DOC=1&TBL=EN_PROJ&RCN=EP_RCN_A:64859&CALLER=PROJ_FP5

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND CULTURE

Irish Presidency highlights role of education in Lisbon Strategy

The Irish Presidency will be paying special attention to the education sector, which it regards as central to the success of the ambitious Lisbon Strategy. The Council will prepare its interim implementation report for the Spring European Council, setting out directions for the future on how best to pursue the essential educational, skills and training aspects of the Lisbon programme.

Discussions on the new generation of European education, training and youth programmes (Leonardo, Socrates and Youth) will also feature on the agenda. Recognising the importance of improved mutual recognition of qualifications for mobility, the Irish Presidency will particularly focus on the "Europass" initiative for transparency of qualifications and competencies. The Irish Presidency will seek to progress the EU White Paper on Youth and the second two common objectives (Voluntary Activities & Greater Understanding of Youth) will begin during the Irish Presidency. Ireland has hosted the European launch of the Year in education through sport and will draw special attention to the educational function of sports, especially those sports that strengthen social cohesion. The closing event of this special year will take place at the end of 2004 in the Netherlands.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Irish Presidency website on Education and Youth policy, available at:

<http://www.eu2004.ie/templates/standard.asp?sNavlocator=4,25,321>

Council Meeting - Education, Youth and Culture

The most recent Education, Youth and Culture Council (November 2003) included agreement on the budget for Erasmus Mundus, commented on the draft interim report for Education and Training Systems 2010 and noted the action plan for languages.

The Council unanimously adopted the EP amendments to the proposed Erasmus Mundus programme, including the Community's budget allocation of €230 million compared to €200 million originally. Erasmus Mundus aims to create European centres of higher education, thereby accelerating the process of convergence of degrees. The Council also discussed the draft joint interim report on education and training systems in Europe (see EI 03:12). A majority of delegations agreed that action on the objectives is required, the principle of subsidiarity should be observed, national differences should be allowed for and progress should be recognised. Presenting the EC action plan on "Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity" Commissioner Reding emphasised that although language teaching was a matter for the individual Member States, the

Community's task was to facilitate and improve co-operation and exchanges. The action plan provided for 45 different projects between 2004 and 2006 using available funds and existing programmes.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC Press Release number PRES/03/1732 of 24 November 2003, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/questen.ksh>

Culture 2000 Programme

The EC Culture 2000 programme has provided grants to 201 projects during 2003, most of which focus on the performing arts, this year's priority field. These projects will share more than €30 million in funding. There are 30 European countries are taking part in Culture 2000 (2000/04), which, this year, is helping more than 750 cultural operators to co-operate on projects with a European dimension.

Early in 2004, the EC should table a proposal for a new cultural programme, due to start in 2007. At a recent meeting of the ministers in charge of culture of the 25, Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Education and Culture, announced that she is currently working on a draft programme based on three priorities: mobility of artists and cultural workers, mobility of works and intercultural dialogue.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC Press Release number IP/03/1716 of 12 December 2003, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/questen.ksh>

List of projects already approved, available at:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/culture/eac/culture2000/project_annuel/projects1_en.html

and:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/culture/eac/culture2000/pluriannuel/projects2_en.html

EXTERNAL COLLABORATION

Swiss participation in FP6

The renewed Research Agreement between Switzerland and the EU, initialled 5 September 2003, entered into force 1 January 2004. The new agreement ensures full participation of Switzerland as an "Associated Country" in FP6. Swiss researchers will have the same rights and opportunities as their partners from EU Member States and they will receive their funding from the EC. In projects for which the funding decision of the EC has already been made in 2003, the Federal Office will assure the funding of Swiss participations on a project-by-project basis for Education and Science (OFES) on behalf of the Swiss Government.

The renewed agreement means that Swiss partners obtain their funding from the EC; there is no further funding procedure in Switzerland.. Swiss partners can now assume the role of co-ordinator and various restrictions for Swiss participants, such as those in Marie-Curie Actions or CRAFT projects, no longer apply.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Swiss website on FP6 participation, available at:

<http://www.bbw.admin.ch/html/pages/forschung/eu/abkommen-e.html>

Western Balkans and Pre-Accession Programmes

The EC proposed 16 December to open tenders under the pre-accession assistance programmes PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD to the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro). This would allow companies in the Western Balkans to establish links with economic operators in the EU Member States, the accession countries and candidate countries, to compete alongside European contractors for work under these programmes and potentially, to win more business.

The overall purpose of this initiative set down in the Thessaloniki Agenda, is to prepare the countries of the Western Balkans for future accession by familiarising them with EU policies, working methods and tendering procedures. This new opportunity will also provide the Western Balkan countries with an additional incentive to foster reforms and to reinforce regional co-operation. This proposal will be submitted to the Council shortly after its approval, and effective participation in tenders under these community instruments is expected in the course of the first half of 2004.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC Press Release number IP/03/1735 of 16 December 2003, available at:
<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh>

Reinforced co-operation with China

European Commissioner for Education and Culture, Viviane Reding, and the People's Republic of China Minister for Culture Sun Jiazheng, declared 19 December 2003 their willingness to strengthen co-operation between the EC and People's Republic of China in the fields of culture, audiovisual, education, training, youth and sport. They made this declaration in a ceremony concluding a three-day official visit of Commissioner Reding in China.

They agreed that furthering co-operation between the EC and the People's Republic of China is important, notably in order to improve mutual understanding and to strengthen their respective situations in a global economy and in a global society. Accordingly, they encourage initiatives to be taken improving the co-operation between the EU and China in the area of education and training, culture, arts, music, literature, and museums.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC Press Release number IP/03/1784 of 19 December 2003, available at:
<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh>

Euro-Indian co-operation in ICT

The EuroIndia 2004 Co-operation Forum on the Information Society organised in New Delhi from 24-26 March 2004, will add new dimensions to business and research collaboration. This three-day event will offer a stimulating mix of plenary presentations, including an opening address by the European Commissioner for Enterprise & Information Society Mr Erkki Liikanen, and innovative parallel workshops covering e-enabling, communication technology, security & standardisation and next generation technology topics. EuroIndia2004 also includes a European Exhibition area

together with outstanding facilities to allow both Europeans and Indians take part in Networking Meetings.

The event intends to highlight ICT developments in Europe and India, assess their potential, better understand mutual requirements and help establish contacts in the business, R&D and academic communities. The chosen themes are among the key priorities in the EC agenda and are supported by the Information Society Technologies (IST) Programme. European and Indian delegates will attend EuroIndia2004 from industrial, research, academic and public administration communities. Participation is free of charge and exhibition stands are also free of charge for European organisations.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Forum website, available at:

www.euroindia2004.org

EVENTS and AWARDS

JRC and development of the ERA – Information Day

The JRC and the National Contact Point for Slovakia are organising a conference on “The ECs JRC promotes the development of a European Research Area for an enlarged Union”. The two day event will be held in Bratislava 4 March 2004 and in Koice the next day.

Highlighting some of the JRCs recent achievements, time will also be allocated to cover future research directions. The event intends to create a structured dialogue with scientific and technological organisations in the Slovak Republic, to help identify new partners and promote increased FP6 collaborations. Three specific parallel sessions will discuss future collaboration, collaborations in environment and energy and metrology, food and agriculture.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Details on the day including registration, available at:

http://www.jrc.cec.eu.int/more_information/infodays/slovak_info2004.htm

Third European Business Summit – Research and Innovation

In Brussels 11 and 12 March 2004, the EC, UNICE and the Federation of Enterprises in Belgium will jointly host the third European Business Summit. The focus of the summit will be research and innovation and their links to the Lisbon goals of increased employment and making the EU the most competitive knowledge based economy in the world by 2010. Further attention will be given to whether the objectives are achievable and realistic.

High level speakers will include Research Commissioner Philippe Busquin and Commissioner for Enterprise and the Information Society, Erkki Liikanen, as well as a wide variety of European business leaders. The summit is widely regarded as the year’s most significant dialogue between the business community and EU policy makers.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Summit website with programme and registration details, available at:

<http://www.ebsummit.org>

NEW PUBLICATIONS and ONLINE RESOURCES

"EUROPA" is Re-born

EUROPA, the multilingual internet site for the EU, is getting a fundamental face-lift in 2004 starting with a new-look home page. The EC, which manages EUROPA, is making a major effort to capture new audiences, and especially to attract young people.

By the end of March 2004, the emerging new EUROPA will offer many new services in a much more user-friendly way. It will feature animated graphs, interactive games, simpler navigation and an improved search function. The languages of the ten new EU countries will gradually be added. Most of the remaining planned changes will be in place by summer 2004.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Europa website, available at:

<http://europa.eu.int>

New Website on the Bologna Process

A new website on the Bologna Process has been created, to cover progress to date, basic information, the work programme, news, seminars and will incorporate information on the May 2005 summit in Bergen, Norway.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Bergen 2005 website, available at:

<http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no>

New CORDIS FP6 Projects Service

CORDIS has just launched its new Projects Service to cover all areas of FP6 with contact details and project fact sheets for all FP6 funded projects. As details on the funded projects, which have been agreed after negotiations have been completed, become available from the EC over the beginning of 2004, the website will be populated with more data, though JRC actions are already searchable.

The website will also seek to raise the profile of successful projects, offer a news service and will provide some guidance on running and managing FP6 projects.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

New projects service website, available at:

<http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/projects.htm>

Eureka and the ERA

Eureka, the European network for market oriented research and development (R&D), has

published a report on the impact of its research projects, highlighting the work that the organisation is doing in the context of the European Research Area (ERA). The report also gives details of Eureka's new "whole life" approach to project evaluation and summarises the socio-economic impact of research funded by the network. According to data provided by these reports, Eureka projects provide an average increase in annual turnover of around €1 million per responding participant, with a further three €3 million expected within three years of project completion. This increase often far outweighs the public funding which participants received for their projects. Eureka has also identified some 11,000 jobs, created as a result of its projects, and an expectation of a further 15,000 within the space of three years.

Finally, the report reaffirms that the industry-driven nature of EUREKA projects and the requirement for financial commitment from participants puts it in a unique position to contribute effectively to the EU three per cent objective - the goal of increasing European research investment to three per cent of GDP by 2010.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EUREKA report, available at:

<http://www.eureka.be/ifs/files/public/Eureka/Publications/Reports/AIR/IR0203.pdf>

EC Report on Human Tissue Engineering Potential

The EC has published a report on prospects for commercial and research activities in the field of human tissue engineering (regeneration of tissues). Tissue engineering as an emerging multidisciplinary biotechnology sector promises to change medical practice profoundly, regenerating diseased tissues and organs instead of just repairing them. The development of this novel biotechnology is connected to new treatment possibilities, better quality of life of patients and, not least, the ability to gradually overcome the constant shortage of donor organs for transplantation. The first products include artificial skin, cartilage and bone. The regulatory framework applied differs across the EU, which presents an obstacle to the growth of tissue-engineering markets in Europe. The EC is currently seeking to prepare legislation which will harmonise the authorisation procedures for marketing products/processes from human tissue engineering. Due to their singularity, products derived from human tissue engineering are not adequately covered by existing European legislation.

The EC report, elaborated by its Institute for Prospective Technological Studies at the EU Joint Research Centre (JRC) in Seville, represents the first comprehensive map of the emerging industry of human tissue engineering in Europe. The paper makes clear that the lack of such an EU-wide authorisation process is hampering the growth of a nascent knowledge-based industry.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

The JRC report, available at:

http://www.jrc.es/home/toolbar/whats_new.html

New Brochure on Freedom, Security and Justice in the EU

On the 22 December 2003, the EC published a new document summarising some of the evolutions in each of the following policy areas since the treaty of Amsterdam came into force on 1 May 1999: freedom of movement and residence for EU citizens, management

of external borders, EU citizenship, guaranteed fundamental rights, asylum, immigration, tackling terrorism and organised crime and policy in a international context as well.

In highlighting some of the major changes and progress made in these fields, the document also offers updates with regard to new member states and the latest issues of concern to EU citizens, referring also to current and future efforts to ensure co-operation in these areas. At present the brochure is only available online and in English.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC brochure, available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/publications/booklets/move/42/index_en.htm

CORDIS

CORDIS is the Community Research and Development Information Service. It is a web-based service which provides information on EU R&D programmes and related issues.

URL: <http://www.cordis.lu>

IGLO Project Search

The IGLO Project Service offers a forum for publishing and disseminating details of proposed FP6 project and/or research skills offered. Using the service will enable researchers to find contacts and partners within the international research community as well as contributing to the mobilisation of a critical mass of researchers in a specific research area.

URL: <http://www.iglortd.org>

EUR-LEX (Official Journal C and L)

This website provides information on EU Law. It includes electronic copies of the Treaties and recent copies of the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJ). The OJ, published daily in eleven languages, consists of two related series, the L series (Legislation) and the C series (Information, notices and preparatory EU legislation), a supplement and an annex. EUR-Lex provides free access to the C and L series of the Official Journal for a period of forty-five days following publication. (The OJ issue with the Euro exchange rates (L 359, 31/12/1998) is permanently available in PDF format in EUR-Lex).

URL: EUR-LEX <http://www.europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/index.html>

Official Journal C & L <http://www.europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/oj/index.html>

Treaty of Amsterdam <http://www.europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/treaties/index.html>

EUROPA

EUROPA is the official European Union's Server. It contains links to the EP, the European Council, the EC and other EU institutions and contains information on EU policies listed by subject area.

URL: <http://www.europa.eu.int/index-en.htm>

RAPID

RAPID is a database giving a daily view of the activities of the EU as presented by the Institutions in their press releases.

EC Press Releases are available at:

<http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh>

GLOSSARY

A&S	Aeronautics and Space Priority (FP6) http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/activities.htm
C&G	Citizens and Governance Priority (FP6) http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/activities.htm
COST	European Co-operation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research is a framework for scientific and technical co-operation, allowing the coordination of national research on a European level. http://www.netmaniacs.com/cost
'Council'	'Council' refers to the 'Council of Ministers', the principle decision-making body within the European Union. It has both executive and legislative powers, the latter in some cases exercised jointly with the European Parliament (co-decision procedure). The Council is composed of one representative at ministerial level from each Member State. Which Ministers attend each Council meeting varies according to the subject discussed, e.g. The Minister of Science in the UK attends the Research Council. http://ue.eu.int/en/summ.htm
Culture 2000	First European Community Framework Programme in support of culture, which runs from 2000/04 (inclusive). http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/culture/index_en.html
EC	The European Commission - made up of 20 Commissioners nominated by the Member States - both initiates proposals for EU legislation and executes EU policies and actions. http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/index_en.htm
eEurope	eEurope A political initiative of the EC to allow Europe to benefit fully from the Information Society. http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/information_society/eeurope/documentation/index_en.htm
EP	The European Parliament - which is made up of elected representatives (MEPs) from all the Member States. It shares decision-making power with the Council in a number of areas including research and education. http://www.europarl.eu.int/sg/tree/en/default.htm

ERA	European Research Area. On 18 January 2000, the EC issued a Communication entitled "Towards a European Research Area" which proposed ways in which research in Europe could be more effectively organised and co-ordinated. http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/research/area.html
ESC	European Economic and Social Committee is a consultative body made up of representatives of Europe's employers' organisations, trade unions, farmers, consumer groups and professional associations. http://www.ces.eu.int Press Releases: http://www.ces.eu.int/en/acs/fr_acs_press_rels.htm
ESF	European Science Foundation. http://www.esf.org
ESF	The European Social Fund http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg05/esf/en/index.htm
Eureka	Eureka is a Europe-wide network for Industrial Research and Development. http://www3.eureka.be/Home
FQS	Food Quality and Safety Priority (FP6) http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/activities.htm
FP (FP5, FP6, FP7)	The EU's Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. The Fifth Framework Programme (FP5) was adopted in 1998 and ran until 2002, with FP6 superseding until 2006, with discussions underway on FP7 beyond 2006. Further information on the thematic and horizontal programme composition of FP6 is available at http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/home.cfm
GBH	Genomics and Biotechnology for Health Priority (FP6) http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/activities.htm
Green Paper	Green Papers are communications published by the European Commission on a specific policy area. Primarily they are documents addressed to interested parties who are invited to participate in a process of consultation and debate. In some cases they provide an impetus for subsequent legislation.
ITRE	The European Parliament Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy (FP5) http://www.europarl.eu.int/committees/en/default.htm
INTAS	International Association for the promotion of co-operation with scientists from the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union. http://www.intas.be/mainfs.htm

IST	Information Society Technologies Priority (FP6) http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/activities.htm
JRC	The EC's Joint Research Centre acting as a scientific and technological laboratory in support of EU policies, with a range of institutes and research activities. http://www.jrc.cec.eu.int
MEDIA	The MEDIA Plus Programme (2001–/05) is to be introduced as a follow-up to the Media II programme which ends in December 2000. The programme aims to strengthen the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry. Http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dg10/avpolicy/media/index_en.html
Mobility	Human Resources and Mobility Programme (FP6) http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/activities.htm
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation http://www.nato.int/
NMP	Nanotechnology, Materials and Production Priority (FP6) http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/activities.htm
PHARE	The Phare Programme is the European Union's instrument for financial and technical co-operation with the countries of central and eastern Europe. http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/pas/phare/index.htm
RTD	Research and Technological Development
SDGC	Sustainable Development and Global Change Priority (FP6) http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/activities.htm
TACIS	The Tacis Programme aims to forge closer economic and political links with the former republics of the Soviet Union and Mongolia (also known as New Independent States (NIS)) http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg1a/tacis/index.htm
Treaty of Amsterdam	The Treaty of Amsterdam was signed in October 1997 and entered into force on 1 May 1999. http://www.europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/treaties/index.html
UUK	Universities UK (formerly the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals) http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk
White Paper	White Papers are documents containing proposals for Community action in a specific area. They often follow a Green Paper.

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