

News on EU Research Policy and Programmes

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EU POLICY.....	2
Social partners give their support to review of the Lisbon Strategy	2
Spring Council supports mid-term review of Lisbon Strategy	2
EC makes its proposal for a Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme to run alongside FP7	3
EP announces new FP7 rapporteur.....	4
Latest news from the ERC identification committee.....	4
STOA President calls for improved scientific governance at EU level	5
EC proposes €11.3 billion for restructuring and employment	5
Eureka! update and Framework Programme 7	6
European Patent Office presentation to the EP	6
European Group on Ethics: opinion on ethical aspects of ICT implants in the human body	7
GMOs: EU legal status.....	8
Advisory group on the food chain and animal and plant health	8
RESEARCH NEWS	8
Nanopatterning.....	9
Unlocking the secrets of inflammation	9
Stem cells and bone marrow transplantation	9
No more sleepless nights.....	10
Why is the North Pole Frozen?	10
EDUCATION, TRAINING AND CULTURE	11
Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna.....	11
Enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy	11
Higher education and vocational education training: EU-Canada co-operation programme.....	12
Work and family life in the EU25 in 2003	12
Education and training: progress towards meeting the Lisbon objectives	13
EXTERNAL COLLABORATION	13
Positive support for Romania and Bulgaria entry into the EU	13
EU to support democratisation and transition in the Ukraine	14
EC plans to boost Euro-Mediterranean partnership.....	15
Western Balkans: EC adopts package of financial support	15
EVENTS and AWARDS.....	16
UKRO annual conference 2005	16
UK - Turkey R&D collaboration day	16
Food safety and quality through the food chain	16
Sustainable urban wastewater treatment and re-use 2005.....	17
NEW PUBLICATIONS and ONLINE RESOURCES	17
Impact of the use of biometrics	17
EU water initiative projects.....	18
Report on climate change and water	18
Report on space and security	19
CORDIS	19
IGLO Project Search.....	19

EUR-LEX (Official Journal C and L).....	19
EUROPA.....	20
RAPID.....	20
GLOSSARY.....	20

EU POLICY

Social partners give their support to review of the Lisbon Strategy

The recent tripartite social summit between the EC and the Social Partners (UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP for employers and ETUC/CEC/Eurocadres for trade unions) and representatives of the present and future EU Presidencies, saw strong support for the recent review of the Lisbon Strategy. The partners jointly stated that the weaknesses in the EU in terms of growth and employment required immediate attention and support was given toward efforts in boosting competitiveness, and improving economic and social systems to attain sustainable growth, employment and social cohesion. The EU Youth Initiative was also the subject of extensive discussion and will include an awareness raising campaign on young people and technology, and an event on active ageing. The social partners also discussed further contributions on employment, lifelong learning and gender equality.

After the meeting, which was chaired by Mr Barroso (EC President) and Jean-Claude Juncker (President of the European Council) the declaration of the Social Partners was presented to the European Council who requested that the EC relaunch the Lisbon Strategy without delay, and acknowledge the important contributions in this context by the EP, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee and the social partners. The Council also called on the social partners to submit a common work programme for growth and employment in the context of their respective areas of competence.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

European Council Conclusions available from the EC website at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/councils/bx20050322/news_en.htm

Spring Council supports mid-term review of Lisbon Strategy

This month saw the European Council welcome the EC communication 'Working together for growth and jobs - A new start for the Lisbon Strategy' and identify three specific strands as essential: knowledge and innovation; Europe as an area in which to invest and work; and growth and employment for social cohesion. In acknowledging the role of knowledge and innovation, the Council emphasised the importance of developing research, education and all forms of innovation. Supporting the 3% investment target in R & D, it was noted that specific intermediate levels should be set out a national level. The 7th Framework Programme (FP7) is viewed as lever on national research budgets, with the aim of contributing to the creation of the European Research Area by enhancing co-operation, stimulating private investment in areas crucial to competitiveness and helping

to fill the technology gap. The improvement in the conditions under which researchers practice their profession across Europe as well as the creation of an ERC are, in particular, considered significant contributors to knowledge creation and innovation.

In addition to the role of FP7 as a vital component of the revised Lisbon Strategy, the Council also hoped that the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) would contribute to creating conditions for innovation throughout the EU, especially in its support for SMEs with high growth potential. The Council also noted that EC intentions to submit a proposal on the establishment of a European Technology Institute and that the European Investment Bank (EIB) will have to extend its Structured Finance Facility to R & D projects, and explore ways of using Community funds to level EIB loans.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Press Release on Presidency Conclusions for Spring 2005 Council available from the Europa website at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=DOC/05/1&format=HTML&aged=0&language=en&guiLanguage=en>

EC makes its proposal for a Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme to run alongside FP7

Subsequent to the Lisbon process placing competition at the centre of political attention, the 2003 Spring Council called for an integrated strategy for boosting EU competitiveness. The EC has responded to this through development of proposals for a programme to combine and enhance activities for increasing innovation and competitiveness in the EU. This programme, the Framework Programme for Competitiveness and Innovation (CIP), is proposed to become one of the main community measures in securing economic growth and creating more jobs. The new programme has been proposed to run alongside FP7, to have a budget of €4.2 billion and to bring together specific support programmes with other relevant community programmes including the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme, the ICT Policy Support Programme and the Intelligent Energy Europe Programme.

In its recent proposal, the EC stresses that CIP and FP7 will be 'complementary and mutually reinforcing' recognising that 'boosting research and innovation capacities throughout Europe will be a shared objective of CIP and FP7'. The EC subsequently proposes that the innovation governance and enterprise actions of CIP should 'feed into the orientation and programming of the future Research Framework Programme and that the CIP should provide opportunities to help research to get into the market place. In addition, the EC states that EU business and innovation support services of CIP, in providing a decentralised structure in regular contact with enterprises, should play a positive role in promoting SME participation in research programmes. Finally, with respect to technological innovation, the CIP should focus on the downstream parts of the research and innovation process with specific emphasis on promotion of innovation support services for technology transfer and use, projects for the implementation and market take-up of existing new technologies in fields like ICT, energy and environmental protection, as well as the development and co-ordination of national and regional innovation programmes and policies.'

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the Competitiveness and Innovation framework Programme (CIP) consultation website at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/cip/consultation.htm

EP announces new FP7 rapporteur

The EP has announced the name of the MEP who will be the rapporteur for their discussions on Framework Programme 7 (FP7). This follows the adoption of the FP7 proposal by the College of Commissioners on 6th April. The announcement on the rapporteur was made at an extra-ordinary meeting of the EP Research Committee (ITRE), at which the FP7 proposal was presented to the committee by Research Commissioner Mr Janez Potočnik.

The rapporteur has been named as the Polish MEP Mr Jerzy Buzek (Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats). Mr Buzek was Prime Minister of Poland from 1997 to 2001. Prior to that, he was involved in research in the areas of energy and environmental protection. Mr Philippe Busquin (Belgium; Socialist Group in the EP) will act as shadow rapporteur. Mr Busquin was, of course, European Commissioner for Research until 2004. The ITRE Committee is expected to have an initial exchange of views on the subject at their next meeting, later this month.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the CORDIS website at:

http://dbs.cordis.lu/fep-cgi/srchidadb?CALLER=FP7_NEWS&ACTION=D&QM_EN_RCN_A=23641

Latest news from the ERC identification committee

After completion of its first stage assessment, the ERC Identification Committee, mandated to identify members of the ERC scientific Governing Council, has summarised the main factors and criteria to be taken into account in the identification of such members.

The Committee has stated that, amongst other factors, the Governing Council must demonstrate that it can exercise scientific leadership which is authoritative and absolutely independent, combining wisdom and experience with vision and imagination. Members of the Governing Council should (individually) have an undisputed reputation as research leaders and their independence and commitment to research must also reflect the broad disciplinary scope of research, embracing the exact sciences and engineering, as well as the social sciences and humanities. In addition, beyond their proven reputation as scientists and researchers, the membership should collectively bring a broader range of experience, acquired not only across Europe but also in other research-intensive parts of the world and reflect the various components of the research community and the range of scientific institutions which carry out research (i.e. it should include those with experience in universities, academies, funding bodies, research in business and industry). Finally,

members should participate in the Governing Council in their personal capacity, working to meet the objectives of the ERC and representing science and research, independently from any political, governmental, industrial or other interest.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the ERC Identification Committee's website at

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/future/basic_research/erc_ic_interim_report_en.htm

STOA President calls for improved scientific governance at EU level

Former EU Commissioner for Research, Philippe Busquin, who is now an MEP and current President of the Scientific Technology Options Assessment (STOA) of the EP, called for the development of more efficient scientific governance. This is required in the context of increasingly international science, and will enable Europe to take more rapid decisions, which will be key to developing into the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world.

Mr Busquin made these comments at a conference on the 14 April 'the futures of Europeans in the global knowledge society'. He also took the opportunity to highlight a modern paradox, that of a perceived tiredness of the general public towards science and technology, whilst at the same time, most EU Council meetings now include discussions around research. Another problem is that the numbers of young scientists are simply too few, demonstrating again the lack of interest in a scientific career. Mr Busquin also said that Europe should work on developing scientific governance at EU level and must also become a key player in developing governance at global level, and this represents a considerable challenge considering the different styles of governance in the EU, and is particularly important given the pressures on research funding.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from STOA website, available at: http://www.europarl.eu.int/stoa/default_en.htm

The 'Futures of Europeans in the Global Knowledge Society' event website is available at: http://www.wallonie-en-ligne.net/2005_EuMPI/

EC proposes €11.3 billion for restructuring and employment

An EC communication entitled 'Anticipating and accompanying restructuring in order to develop employment: the role of the EU' outlines plans to allocate up to €11.3 billion to people and regions affected by economic change. A proposal to strengthen social dialogue, streamline existing policies, increase and refocus existing funding, has been put forward as a means to equip individuals to cope with change, promote new enterprise in areas affected by economic change and to anticipate restructuring.

The Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Vladimir Spidla, said that the plans aimed to provide new opportunities; support regions affected by globalisation and invest in regions so that they can meet the challenges of the future. Key objectives will be increasing adaptability of workers and enterprises, preventing unemployment (through job creation and promoting growth) and promoting partnership. The €11.3 billion will come in part from a 'growth adjustment fund' and from small shares of the convergence and competitiveness budgets. The EC calls for more co-ordinated

work on EU policies (especially employment, industrial, enterprise, trade and competition policies), adapting the regulatory framework (including a Green Paper on the Evolution of Labour Law in 2006) and developing partnerships such as through a European 'Restructuring Forum' of the main stakeholders.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Further information on the measures proposed by the EC can be found in the Communication which is available from the Europa website at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2005/apr/com_restruct_en.pdf

Eureka! update and Framework Programme 7

The EP held a recent briefing in which Eureka (a pan-European network for market oriented, industrial Research and Development) was presented to the EP Industry Research and Energy Committee (ITRE). The briefing was chaired by Avril Doyle, MEP (Ireland, Christian Democrats), who said that she was 'impressed with the range and work of Eureka', which after 20 years of operation now has 36 member countries and has supported more than 2,600 projects, which had a value exceeding €22 billion. There are two main strands to Eureka activities; SME networks and Clustering activities and Eureka considers that the label they can provide to successful projects offers greater chances of attracting further finances and raises the profile of the project which tend to be more about innovation, and capitalising on research, rather than research itself. While Eureka itself offers no funding, participants often find the advice, networking and dissemination of best practice highly useful, and the Eureka label can be applied for and achieved within a four month period.

In response to the success of Eureka, the EP has suggested that Eureka be mentioned specifically in the proposals for Framework 7. This does not imply any EC funding or other financial changes to the Eureka network, but places Eureka firmly within the European Institutions efforts to realise the European Research Area and the Lisbon Agenda. It is thought for example that some of the platforms under the Eureka label might go on to become Joint Technological Initiatives (JTIs) in FP7, just as some existing Technology Platforms might do the same. Eureka also sees a role for itself in all the JTIs to be established, especially to aid the integration of SMEs. Discussions are also under way with the EC to consider the use of Article 169 to provide community level support, to promote SMEs in Europe.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the Eureka website at: <http://www.eureka.be/home.do>

European Patent Office presentation to the EP

Upon invitation by the chairman of the EP Committee for Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), Giles Chichester, MEP, the European Patent Office (EPO) held a recent information day at the EP in Brussels. This, the first ever information day of the EPO at was used as a platform to present how European patents contribute to the economy and what benefits society at large could derive from the system.

The EPO cites its main tasks as bridging legal certainty to the innovation process and even as a catalyst of this process through its extensive information systems. For the EPO, European patents bring legal certainty to the innovation process because of the quality and flexibility of the patent law, and the patenting process. Less than a third of patent applications filed with the EPO lead to a European patent as a result of a rigorous examination procedure carried out by scientists and engineers, of which the EPO has 3,500, operating as patent examiners. Most patents are also reduced in scope prior to grant. This compares to the US system, where it is relatively easy to attain a patent, but legal uncertainty may lead to claim and counterclaim thereafter, drawing out the process and often proving costly. The process has come under considerable scrutiny regarding several fields of technology, most famously with computer-implemented inventions and software. The EPO follows Community directives such as the European Patent Convention, which means that the EPO does not grant patents on pure software, algorithms per se, or on business methods.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

(Including presentations from the information day) available from the European Patent Office website at: <http://www.european-patent-office.org/index.en.php>

European Group on Ethics: opinion on ethical aspects of ICT implants in the human body

The European Group on Ethics (EGE) recently adopted Opinion No. 20 on the ethical aspects of information and communication technologies (ICT) implants in the human body and presented it to the EC. Ethical issues can arise if ICT implants are accessible via digital networks where there is the potential for manipulation and surveillance or where devices are implanted for the purpose of individual or social control. The EGE stresses that the inviolability of the human body should not be used as a principle to inhibit advances in science and technology but rather prevent possible misuses. The Opinion also makes the general point that non-medical applications of implants present the greatest threat to human dignity and the democracy.

The EGE also points out that the principles of data protection need to be applied to the whole area of ICT implants, that implants could be used to enhance physical and mental capabilities as long as this does not lead to a two-tier society and that surveillance applications of ICT implants may only be permitted in extreme circumstances by the legislature where no other methods exists. Finally, the Opinion calls for a wide-ranging public debate on the acceptable application of ICT implants and states that regulation is urgently needed in the field of medical and non-medical implants. The EGE subsequently calls on the EC to launch legislative initiatives in this area.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the EGE website at:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/european_group_ethics/index_en.htm

GMOs: EU legal status

The EU has recently released a list of approved genetically modified (GM) products for use in the 25 Member States. The idea of the list is to avoid confusion with respect to which products can, and cannot be imported/exported across the EU and specifically to clarify the legal status of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) allowed for sale in the EU.

According to Mr Markos Kyprianou, the EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection 'the register makes it clear which products can legally be sold in the EU, although in reality many of these products may not currently be on the EU market.' New legislation put into place last year (April 2004) requires a thorough authorisation procedure and a scientific safety assessment of GMOs by the European Food Safety Authority and all 26 products have been approved through this mechanism.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Register of GM products available from the Europa website at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/biotechnology/authorisation/register_notification/index.htm

Advisory group on the food chain and animal and plant health

In August 2004, the EC adopted a decision to create an 'Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health'. The applicants were required to be EU or trans-national organisations representing bodies in all or most Member States. The objectives of the organisations have to be of general interest and linked to food and feed policy.

The 36 members of the 'Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health' have been now been selected. The establishment of the advisory group was decided in the General Food regulation of 2002, in order to formalise and reinforce the consultation of stakeholders on EU policy related to the food and feed chain. The group will provide input into the preparation, revision and evaluation of legislative proposals. As part of the public consultation process, members can ask the competent Commission services about issues of particular relevance to their sector. Organisations which were not selected as members to the Advisory Group will still be able to participate in ad hoc working groups on specific health and consumer protection issues they have an interest in.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC MEMO/05/137 which can also be downloaded from the Europa website at: <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/searchAction.do>

RESEARCH NEWS

Nanopatterning

The European NAPA (Emerging Nanopatterning Methods) project aims to provide low-budget tools and processes to meet the need of nanoprinting and applications in nanoelectronics, nanobiotechnology and nanophotonics.

The project is co-ordinated by VTT (the Technical Research Centre of Finland) and is made up of 35 partners including SMEs and Universities. The consortium is not only conducting research but also organising training courses and seminars for new scientists to boost academic and practical training in areas related to research into nanotechnologies.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from Cordis wire website at:

http://dbs.cordis.lu/cordis-cgi/srchidadb?ACTION=D&SESSION=198692005-4-26&DOC=10&TBL=EN_RTDN&RCN=EN_RCN_ID:3000&CALLER=CORDISwire

Unlocking the secrets of inflammation

Inflammation is a necessary but sometimes problematic process. Whilst in cases, such as sore throats and cuts and grazes, inflammation helps to fight infection, in others (such as asthma and allergies) it is the inflammation itself which is the problem. Under funding from the EU, the MAIN project has seen the development of a number of tutorials to inform the general public on the biological processes involved in inflammation. The tutorials are structured as a virtual tour of how inflammation works with diagrams intended to explain the underlying processes.

The tutorials cover the biological mechanisms required to take leukocytes (cells involved in the inflammatory process) from the blood stream into the surrounding tissues (where chemicals released by the cells with either kill bacteria or exert damaged depending on the circumstance). The tutorials contain simplistic diagrams detailing the cells and adhesion molecules involved in the process and are of particular interest to non scientists wishing to learn more about inflammation in general. The Network of Excellence is made up of 15 partners from seven different countries and was awarded €10 million funding.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the project website at: <http://main-noe.org/index.php>

Stem cells and bone marrow transplantation

Under its sixth Framework Programme (FP6), the EC is spending €8 million to help in the fight against leukaemia. Allostem, the biggest ever funded immunotherapy programme, brings together over 50 scientific and clinical research groups from 19 different countries. Allostem aims to develop techniques, using the latest advances in stem cell transplantation, to address problems surrounding bone marrow or haematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) which is still the only therapy available able to cure leukaemia. The idea is to reduce the risks around this therapy making bone marrow transplants both safer and more effective. The project is expected to reduce the risk of graft versus host

disease, generate selective anti-tumour immune responses, provide protective immunity against opportunistic infections and extend applicability of this treatment to a larger proportion of patients.

By bringing together a wide range of experts (i.e. in stem cell biology, immunogenetics, cell and organ transplantation and immunotherapy), AlloStem aspires to develop new technologies in the field of stem cell transplantation for eventual application toward clinical benefit. AlloStem also features experts in law, ethics, social science and representatives of patients' and donor organisations within its partner group and is co-ordinated by Alejandro Madrigal, scientific director at the Anthony Nolan Trust. Of AlloStem, the project partners are quoted as saying "By reducing post-transplant illness AlloStem's programme will have a huge social impact, ensuring that a greater number of adults and children will be treated in the future. This will lead to an improvement in healthcare and the development of new pharmaceuticals that will have a dramatic impact on treatment worldwide'.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available at: <http://www.ebmt.org/5WorkingParties/IBWP/documents/AlloStem.pdf>

No more sleepless nights

Sleep disruption, which has implications for general health and also road and workplace safety, is becoming a real problem for the EU. To try and gain better understanding of the cause(s) of poor sleep, the EC has recently awarded funding to researchers in the UK (University of Surrey), Finland, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland).

€4.4 million was awarded by the EC under the Marie Curie research training network programme to train doctoral and post-doctoral researchers in this field who will undertake training in this field of research in academic institutions outside their home country looking at both biomedical and sociological factors that cause poor sleep

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the CORDIS website at: http://dbs.cordis.lu/fep-cgi/srchidadb?CALLER=FP6_NEWS&ACTION=D&SESSION=&RCN=EN_RCN_ID:23724

Why is the North Pole Frozen?

A team of European scientists has been investigating the mechanism which sets off the accumulation of ice. The data used has been built up over years, and includes remains of marine organisms as well as climate models, which all helped to understand why, over the last 2.7 million years, ice has been building up in the Arctic. The research has helped understand, in greater detail, modern climate changes and in particular the role of the ocean.

The freezing of the Arctic Ocean was triggered by a sudden fall in world temperatures 2.7 million years ago, although this alone does not explain the quantity of ice which has accumulated and remained to this day. According to the group, led by Antoni Rosell for the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and Gerald H. Haug from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Change, the answer lies in a temperature difference increase of seven

degrees Celsius between summers and winters. This meant that more water evaporated into the atmosphere in the summer and as winter set in the snowfall increased and allowed the ice to build up. The difference in seasonal temperatures was in turn due to changes in the stratification of ocean water as freshwater increased, but failed to mix in the ocean especially in the summer months.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from:

<http://www.uab.es/servlet/Satellite?cid=1096476786473&pagename=UAB%2FPPage%2FTemplatePlanaAgendaNoticias1&c=Page¬iciaid=1096477109910>

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND CULTURE

Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna

The European Universities Association (EUA) has published “Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna report”. The report provides an in-depth and up-to-date snapshot of the state of implementation of Bologna reforms in Europe’s universities, based on an analysis of visits to sixty-two Institutions. Its findings will feed into the drafting of the Communiqué for the next Bologna Process Ministerial Meeting to be held in Bergen (19-20 May 2005).

The report identifies several key themes, and demonstrates that institutions are embracing and coping well with the reforms. There has been considerable progress towards introducing three cycle degree structure across the Member States and these structural changes have required significant societal and cultural shifts in many cases. In many institutions there are concerns about the employability of graduates following completion of the first cycle. Quality assurance and enhancement is still a major implementation issue, and there have been developments with respect to recognition of qualifications. Finally, there is concern amongst some, that implementing these changes has reduced the amount of time they have been able to research. In conclusion, the report suggests that there is general acceptance of the need for reforms in universities, and that this needs to be reflected at a societal level, particularly in terms of financial support.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the EUA website at:

http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/TrendsIV_final.1114509452430.pdf

Enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy

This month the EC published its communication ‘Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy’. The

Communication follows on from work started by 'The Role of Universities in the Europe of Knowledge' consultation. This new Communication, in putting universities at the heart of the success of the Lisbon Agenda, summarises the increasing challenges facing Europe and its universities, the need for a modernisation agenda and priorities for action.

In acknowledging the fundamental role of Europe's universities in the Lisbon Strategy, the Communication states that substantial investment in Europe's universities is required. It recognises three main challenges - those of quality, financial sustainability and management - and calls on Member States to work on a new partnership with their universities. The Commission believes that the extent of these issues varies across the Member States, and requires action in three different directions: improve the attractiveness of European universities; improve system and institutional management, and effective investment strategies. The Communication also states that the Commission is exploring ways in which to support doctoral and postgraduate schools, as well as taking forward its proposal for a European Institute of Technology. The Commission hopes the European Council and Parliament will provide explicit support for this agenda for change.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the EC, Europa website at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/comuniv2005_en.pdf

Higher education and vocational education training: EU-Canada co-operation programme

Canada and the EU signed an agreement in December 2002 to forge co-operation in higher education and training activities. The aim of the agreement is to develop closer links between the European Community and Canada, for example in enhancing knowledge of the different languages and cultures. It is also hoped that further co-operation will improve the quality of human resource development in both the European Community and Canada e.g. in acquisition of the skills required if the EU is to successfully move toward becoming a knowledge-based economy.

In relation to the co-operation agreement, this month saw the EC release a call for proposals under an EU-Canada co-operation programme in higher education and vocational training. The programme is designed to support innovative, multilateral, student-centred projects with the potential to stimulate substantive and long-lasting structural and transatlantic co-operation in higher education.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the EC, Europa website at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/eu-canada/call_en.html

Work and family life in the EU25 in 2003

A recent EUROSTAT report on the gender gaps in the reconciliation between work and family life has highlighted some interesting points.

The report indicates that, in the EU, participation in employment and the amount of time worked by women aged between 20 and 49 are closely linked to the number and age of their children. In 2003, the employment rate for women aged 20 to 49 without children under 12 in the EU25 was 75% compared with 60% for those with children over 12. More

surprisingly, the opposite effect was observed for men for whom the employment rate increased from 86% for those without young children to 91% for those with children under 12. The report also studies indicators such as the employment rates by the age of the youngest child, part-time work per number of children and the organisation of work in couples with or without children.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

A summary of the report can be found EC press release STAT/05/49 which can be downloaded from <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/searchAction.do>. The full report can also be downloaded from the Eurostat website at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/>

Education and training: progress towards meeting the Lisbon objectives

The EC has recently published the second annual report examining performance and progress of education and training systems in the EU. The report monitors progress towards education's role in the Lisbon objectives, formalised in the Barcelona Council meeting (2002), to make education and training systems in Europe a world quality reference by 2010. The report makes several key observations. Firstly, that the high number of early school leavers is an obstacle to securing greater social cohesion in the EU and that this rate should be reduced to 10% by 2010. Secondly, it argues that an adequate supply of scientists is crucial for a knowledge-based economy. Thirdly, it argues that successful participation in the knowledge society requires the basic building blocks offered by an upper secondary-level education and that acquiring basic competencies is a first step to participation in the developing knowledge society. In addition, the report also highlights that the EU suffers from under-investment in human resources, especially in higher education. In addition, the report reinforces that the EU needs to attract more than one million teachers to the teaching profession, because of the numbers of teachers that are expected to retire over the next decade.

The report re-emphasizes the central role of indicators and benchmarks in measuring progress towards the common objectives and therefore the success of the Lisbon strategy. The EC believes that without valid and comparable data in all strategic areas, Member States will lack information on the contribution of their activities in education and training to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives. The EC hopes to extend its research capacity in statistics and indicators in the area of lifelong learning by establishing a 'research unit on lifelong learning' at the Joint Research Centre at ISPRA.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC Staff working paper available from the Europa website at:
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/progressreport05.pdf>

EXTERNAL COLLABORATION

Positive support for Romania and Bulgaria entry into the EU

With votes of 497 in favour, 93 against and 71 abstentions with respect to Romania and 522 votes in favour, 70 against and 69 abstentions for Bulgaria, the EP has given its thumbs up for accession to the EU. The EP said of Bulgaria that the country had made

excellent progress and was supportive of its economic performance. However, the Bulgarian parliament was criticized for failing to adopt new penal codes for fighting corruption more effectively and the EP asked for more efforts in combating organised crime. With respect to Romania, MEPs praised reforms introduced in Romania and further commitments made by the newly installed government, such as on increasing freedom of the press, improvements in schools and participation in the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion', but were concerned on a number of issues including the need for effective implementation of administrative and judicial reforms, continued fight against corruption, eradication of all violence and discrimination against minority groups and more efficient border controls.

Now that its approval has been given, the EP has no formal role to play in the run-up to the accession of the two countries. However, MEPs have made it clear that they want to be able to continue to influence the course of events in both countries until the actual accessions (which are scheduled for 2007) take place. The EP therefore wishes to be involved in a new mechanism, introduced in the Accession Treaty for Bulgaria and Romania, and by which the Council may decide on a proposal from the EC to postpone accession if the two countries fail to take measures required in time.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EP press release at:

http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/sipade2?SAME_LEVEL=1&LEVEL=2&NAV=X&DETAIL=&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT%2BPRESS%2BDN-20050413-1%2B0%2BDOC%2BXML%2BV0//EN#SECTION1. Further information on enlargement and Bulgaria and Romania can be found at the EC, enlargement website at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/enlargement.htm>

EU to support democratisation and transition in the Ukraine

Late last month, the European Troika met Ukrainian Foreign Minister Boris Tarasyuk to discuss EU-Ukraine relations and in particular, co-operation. The meeting took place in Kiev and talks focused on implementation of the EU-Ukraine European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plan (signed in February this year), in addition to internal developments within the Ukraine. The issue of the Transnistria conflict in Moldova was also broached and discussions focused on the opening of the EU Delegation in Moldova before the summer which, it is hoped, should facilitate co-operation between Ukraine and Moldova on key issues such as border management. With respect to the issue of visas between the Ukraine and the EU, the EC intimated that discussions should initiate in a few months time.

Jean Asselborn, the current President of the Council of the EU was quoted as saying 'the Luxembourg Presidency is committed to working together with Ukraine to strengthen relations between the EU and Ukraine,' 'Furthering our relations will depend to a large extent on Ukraine's progress with implementing internal reforms and reforms aimed at bringing Ukrainian legislation into line with that of the EU.'

FURTHER INFORMATION:

On the EUs relationship with Ukraine available at:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/ukraine/intro/

EC plans to boost Euro-Mediterranean partnership

This month saw the EC launch a work programme developed specifically to reinforce Euro-Mediterranean partnership over the next five years. In the recent communication, the EC highlighted three main areas for focus: education, sustainable economic growth; and human rights and democracy. In addition, the work programme looks at social reform, environmental issues, migration, weapons of mass destruction and counter-terrorism.

Regarding education, the report focuses on increasing the quality of education and boosting access to education for all and in order to achieve these objectives, the EC proposes actions to include promotion of increased EU and Member State support for education and vocational training, seeking commitment from partners for eradication of illiteracy in the region (by 2015) and launching of a scheme offering scholarships for university study in Europe. With respect to economic growth and reform, the EC proposes that a road-map should be agreed for the creation of a Free Trade Area by 2010, Euro-Med partners should launch regional negotiations on a voluntary basis on the liberalisation of services and establishment and that Euro-Med partners should agree a road map for agricultural liberalisation. With respect to human rights and democracy, the EC is seeking a new focus and greater co-operation within the Euro-Med partnership on a number of issues including protection of human rights and empowerment of women.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC press release: IP/05/419 available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/419&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Communication to Council and EP available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/barcelona_10/docs/10th_comm_en.pdf

Western Balkans: EC adopts package of financial support

Under the heading of the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation (CARDS) Programme, the EC has recently adopted a financial package to be spent within the Western Balkans

The CARDS Programme is designed to facilitate participation of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, including Kosovo, in the stabilisation and association Process, which is the EU's policy for the countries of the region until their eventual accession. EU assistance to the Western Balkans has previously been given to help generate sustainable economic recovery and promote social development and structural reform. Previous years have seen focus toward rebuilding infrastructure and in developing government institutions and legislation. In addition, specific assistance has been given in order to help the Western Balkans reach harmonisation with the EU acquis (i.e. in re-inforcing democracy, human rights and the operation of a free market economy). In total, € 5 billion has been given by the CARDS programme to cover the period 2000-2006. Within the current package, € 34.5 million will be spent for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, € 184 million for Serbia and Montenegro and € 54 million for Kosovo. The CARDS Programmes for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina are under development and are expected to be

approved later on in the year. In addition, Croatia (which has been granted candidate country status) can expect to benefit from pre-accession financial assistance while remaining eligible for participation in the CARDS regional programme.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC press release: IP/05/408 available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/408&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

EVENTS and AWARDS

UKRO annual conference 2005

The UK Research Office's 2005 Annual Conference will be held at Aston University in Birmingham, UK on 30 June and 1 July 2005.

The conference will include sessions on the EC Proposal on FP7, as well as Technology Platforms and the impact of Full-Economic Costing (FEC) on participation in EU funding programmes.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Information about the Conference, as well as a link to the booking form, will soon be available at: <http://www.ukro.ac.uk/public/pub/events.htm>

UK - Turkey R&D collaboration day

Turkey has been a full member of FP6 since 2002. The UK Research Office (UKRO) and its Turkish counterpart in Brussels, the Turkish Research and Business Organisations (TUR&BO) are jointly hosting this 'Collaboration Day', at the University of Newcastle, so that researchers can appreciate the strengths in the Turkish research landscape; hear about mechanisms for funding potential collaboration; establish new contacts and networks in order to benefit from remaining opportunities in FP6; and position themselves in readiness for FP7.

This event is open on a UK-wide basis and UK participants should register by contacting the UK Research Office (ukro@bbsrc.ac.uk)

FURTHER INFORMATION:

None

Food safety and quality through the food chain

An international food and nutrition congress will take place in Istanbul, Turkey, from 15 to 18 June 2005, co-ordinated by TÜBİTAK Marmara Research Centre Food Institute. Congress topics will include: new trends in food processing and preservation technologies; food safety; food biotechnology; organic and low input foods; food additives, contaminants and residues; functional foods; nutrition, food and health; food

regulations and standards and new trends in methods of food analysis, detection and control.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the TÜBİTAK website at: <http://www.tubitakcongress2005.org>

Sustainable urban wastewater treatment and re-use 2005

This conference (to be held 15-16 September 2005 at the Hilton Park, Nicosia, Cyprus) focuses on urban wastewater treatment technologies and systems (including innovative ones) and on urban wastewater utilization schemes. It aims at stimulating the interest of people in the safe reuse of wastewater with the overall objective being exploiting a supplemental water source, fresh water saving, safe effluent disposal, and the protection of environment and public health. It also aims at supporting the competent authorities and all actors involved in the specific field by providing them new knowledge on various technologies, methods and tools for the promotion of best practices.

The Conference will provide an opportunity to bring together scientists, engineers and professionals from government departments, private institutions, consultants, research, education and training institutions, being a forum for the exchange of the most recent ideas, techniques and experiences in all areas of wastewater management. Topics of interest will include: integration of wastewater reuse in the overall water resources management; technologies for sustainable wastewater treatment; quality Standards; wastewater reuse and socio economic issues related to wastewater management. Deadline for abstracts is the 15th May 2005.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Available from the conference website at:

<http://www.ucy.ac.cy/conferencesE/ucyconferencesE/SUWTR2005.pdf>

NEW PUBLICATIONS and ONLINE RESOURCES

Impact of the use of biometrics

Following a request by the EP Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE Committee), the EC Joint Research Centre compiled a recent report entitled 'Biometrics at the Frontiers: assessing the impact on society'. Following an EU decision to introduce biometrics in passports, visas and residence permits starting in 2006, biometrics will become increasingly common in our daily lives. The report therefore recommends that policy-makers act now to shape the future use of biometrics rather than being reactive.

The report first defines basic biometric concepts before covering biometric technologies. It further studies the impact of biometric technologies in terms of economic, legal, technical and social aspects. From an economic perspective, the report points out to the role the EU member states can play in assisting the emergence of a European biometrics industry. On the legal side, it concludes that appropriate safeguards for privacy and data

protection will have to be put in place. On the technological side, a lack of independent empirical data is identified, therefore calling for large-scale field trials to be conducted. As regards the social side, the report raises the need to focus attention on making biometric applications acceptable to citizens by clearly setting out their purpose and limitations.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

The report can be downloaded from the JRC website at:

<ftp://ftp.jrc.es/pub/EURdoc/eur21585en.pdf>

EU water initiative projects

The EU Water for Life website, which focuses on the research dimension of the EU Water Initiative, has been updated to include details of new projects in this field.

The Water for Life website contains a database of water-related scientific activities. This is searchable by project acronym, title or project ID, by category, by country or basin, or by participants. A separate PDF file contains information on new activities, which may not have yet been uploaded to the database.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Database search facility available at:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/research/water-initiative/index2_en.cfm

Details of new activities available at:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/research/dossier/do220305/pdf/euwi_projects050317.pdf

Report on climate change and water

The EC Joint Research Centre (JRC) has recently published a report on 'Climate Change and the European Water Dimension'. This report, which was published to co-incide with World Water Day last month, states that climate change can lead to rises in the sea level. This can lead to coastal erosion, affecting nutrients and sediment and causing a loss of marine organisms. Such alterations in the biological, chemical and physical characteristics of European water bodies are fully described in the new report.

The report also looks at the risk of weather-related natural hazards in Europe, related to climate change, and predicts a rise in these in coming years. It is clear from the report that there is need for solutions to be found to these problems, and the authors call for the application of new climate change scenarios; this would allow prediction of the impact on land and water systems at local level, thus allowing assessment of mitigation strategies and their associated costs.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

The reports is available from the JRC website at: <http://ies.jrc.cec.eu.int>

Report on space and security

A report on space and security has recently been published. The report summarises findings from a panel of 150 experts, coming from a wide range of backgrounds, who assessed European security needs from space and considered issues relating to civil and military security. The report shows that space technologies can play a key role in assisting the police, emergency response services, armed forces and agencies undertaking humanitarian relief efforts to respond more effectively not only to terrorist attacks but also to natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis.

Integrated monitoring and communication systems, combining satellite and terrestrial technologies, have the potential to reduce loss of life, assets and natural resources arising from such events in the future. The panel recognizes that some existing initiatives, such as the European Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) will offer capabilities in that respect. It also recommends the urgent establishment of a platform to continue the process of consolidating security-related needs for space technologies.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

EC press release IP/05/351 which can be downloaded from: <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/351&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>. The full report can be downloaded from the EC website at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/space/off_docs_en.html. Information on the European Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) can be found at http://europa.eu.int/comm/space/programmes/gmes_en.html.

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	<p>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.</p> <p>http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/index_en.htm</p>
eEurope	<p>eEurope</p> <p>A political initiative of the EC to allow Europe to benefit fully from the Information Society.</p> <p>http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/information_society/eeurope/documentation/index_en.htm</p>
EP	<p>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.</p> <p>http://www.europarl.eu.int/sg/tree/en/default.htm</p>
ERA	<p>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.</p> <p>http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/research/area.html</p>
ESC	<p>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.</p> <p>http://www.ces.eu.int</p> <p>Press Releases:</p> <p>http://www.ces.eu.int/en/acs/fr_acs_press_rels.htm</p>
ESF	<p>European Science Foundation.</p> <p>http://www.esf.org</p>
ESF	<p>The European Social Fund</p> <p>http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg05/esf/en/index.htm</p>
Eureka	<p>Eureka is a Europe-wide network for Industrial Research and Development.</p> <p>http://www3.eureka.be/Home</p>
FQS	<p>Food Quality and Safety Priority (FP6)</p> <p>http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/activities.htm</p>
FP (FP5, FP6, FP7)	<p>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.</p> <p>Further information on the thematic and horizontal programme composition of FP6 is available at</p> <p>http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/home.cfm</p>

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 The Treaty of Amsterdam was signed in October 1997 and
Amsterdam 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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