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News on EU Research Policy and Programmes

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EU Policy

Innovation scoreboard published for 2008

The EC has just published the 2008 Innovation Scoreboard, which assesses innovation performance of countries across the Europe. The Scoreboard does show that Europe has some of the most innovating countries in the world. Finland, Switzerland and Sweden, for example, are cited as some of the world leaders in innovation. The scoreboard also finds that the gap between the best and worst performing EU Member States has narrowed, as has the gap between the EU and Japan/US. The study, however, does acknowledge that a significant gap remains. The study particularly welcomes progress in the EU on access to broadband and venture capital and the increased numbers of graduates from European universities.

The Scoreboard tries to group countries together into one of four categories: the 'innovation leaders', which are Switzerland, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Denmark and the UK, have with innovation performance well above the EU average; the 'innovation followers' are Austria, Ireland, Luxembourg, Belgium, France and the Netherlands, with a performance above the EU average; the 'moderate innovators' are Cyprus, Iceland, Estonia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Norway, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy, with innovation performance below the EU average; finally, the 'catching-up countries' are Malta, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Croatia, Romania, Latvia, Bulgaria and Turkey, where innovation performance is well below the EU average.

Further information

The Innovation Scoreboard pages, which include links to Member State performances and comparisons with the US and Japan, are available at: <http://www.proinno-europe.eu/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.display&topicID=437&parentID=51>

Announcement of new research infrastructures

Ten new research infrastructures have been announced. They were identified by the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI), which is composed of representatives of EU Member States. There has been an extensive consultation process to decide on the infrastructures, involving more than 200 experts. These ten new projects bring the total up to 44; 34 of the original 35 proposed in 2006 have been endorsed and their preparatory phases are being supported through FP7 funding. A call is planned to be opened at the end of 2009 to support the ten additional projects which included: three in the environmental sciences; four in biological and medical sciences; one in non-nuclear energy; one in materials and analytical facilities; and one in physical sciences and engineering.

The European Commissioner for Research, Janez Potočnik, stated that, "Developing world class infrastructures is an essential part of building the European Research Area, and must be one of the priorities of the EU and national recovery plans. To get these infrastructures operational quickly, I hope that Member States will also avoid any further delays in adopting the proposal for a European legal framework for European research infrastructures (ERI)." The announcement was made at the European Conference on Research Infrastructures (ECRI) 2008, which was organised under the French Presidency of the EU.

Further information

Further information on ESFRI including the 2008 Roadmap up-date is available at: <http://cordis.europa.eu/esfri/home.html>

Details on the conclusions and presentations from ECRI 2008 are available at: <http://www.ecri2008.eu/spip.php?rubrique57>

R&D priorities of the 2009 Czech Presidency

The Czech Presidency of the EU started in January and runs until June 2009. During this period, the Presidency will focus on the following R&D priorities: research infrastructures; development of human resources in research and the development and mobility of researchers; the evaluation of results of investments into research and development; and the Ljubljana Process, which is the political agreement to achieve a true European Research Area (ERA).

On the issue of research infrastructures, the Czech Presidency wishes to reach agreement on an EU-wide legal framework for a European Research Infrastructure (ERI). On the issue of the development and mobility of researchers, the key aim of the Presidency is to remove the barriers to the career development of young scientists. In relation to the evaluation of the results of investments into R&D, the Presidency will continue to stimulate the ex-post evaluation of FP6, but it will also focus on the preparation of FP7 mid-term evaluation. Finally, in relation to the Ljubljana Process, the Czech Presidency aims to initiate the discussion on how to implement this vision particularly in relation to Joint Programming.

Further information

The website of the Czech Presidency is available at: <http://www.eu2009.cz/en/>

The CORDIS Czech Presidency service is available at: http://cordis.europa.eu/czech-republic/presidency/home_en.html

Galileo calls and info day

The 2008 round of Galileo calls opened on 19 December 2008. A total of 11 topics are included in the call and the deadline is 31 March 2009. The total indicative budget for the call is around €30 million and this will be spent mainly on collaborative projects. Later in the year a series of tenders will open too. The Galileo calls are there to fund R&D projects that will develop Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) applications and technologies.

The EC also held an information day in Brussels on 27-28 January to provide stakeholders with information on the calls. The first day set the context and provided the audience with information on the EGNOS and Galileo satellite systems. The second day focused more specifically on the topics in the current call and gave potential applicants advice and tips on how to submit a good proposal. The slides themselves will be made available online over the coming days.

Further information

Full details of the Galileo call is available at:

http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm?fuseaction=UserSite.FP7DetailsCallPage&call_id=191

The website of the GNSS supervisory authority is available at: <http://www.gsa.europa.eu>

The Growing Galileo conference website, which is where the presentations will be uploaded, is available at: <http://www.gsa.europa.eu/go/communications/events/growing-galileo-09>

A modernised air traffic management system

The EC recently agreed new rules for the use of data link in air traffic management (ATM) systems in Europe. From 1 January 2011, all new aircraft will be equipped with data link technology while existing aircraft will need to have it installed by 2015. Data link technology allows the ground-air transmission of written messages between the air traffic controller and the aircraft's pilot. These services should cover Austria, Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and the UK by February 2013, and the rest of Europe by February 2015.

The move will significantly improve Europe's airspace capacity. Once seventy five per cent of aircraft are equipped with it, airspace capacity should increase by 11 per cent. The economic benefits are estimated to equate to €875 million by 2025. The deployment of data link technology will also improve safety by reducing the risk of vocal misunderstandings through the use of written communication between pilots and controllers.

At the same time, an agreement has been signed between the EU and Japan on the issue of co-operation on aviation. As well as agreeing closer co-operation on air traffic management, including the SESAR programme, the agreement also covers efforts to reach agreements in relation to security restrictions on liquids.

Further information

EC press releases IP/09/63 and IP/09/64 of 16 January 2009 are available at:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/>

The EC web pages on the Single European Sky initiative are available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/transport/air/single_european_sky/single_european_sky_en.htm

EC biodiversity strategy on invasive species

The EC has released a Communication that puts forward a series of policy options for developing a strategy to deal with the species from abroad that pose a threat to European biodiversity. These foreign species are known as alien invasive species, one example is the Harlequin ladybird, originally from Asia, which is a threat to native ladybirds in the UK as well as butterflies and other insects. These invasive species can disrupt local flora and fauna, which can cause damage to the natural environment and human health. Controlling these species and repairing the damage is estimated to cost European economies at least €12 billion per year.

Whilst some countries have legislation to protect their natural biodiversity there is no harmonised approach across the EU. The EC Communication proposes several options for a coordinated approach and also measure which can be put in place immediately, including a Europe-wide early warning system to report new and emerging species. Feedback from stakeholders and other EU institutions will be taken into account by the Commission in finalising its proposal for an EU strategy, which it intends to bring forward in 2010.

Further information

Further information is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/invasivealien/index_en.htm

New plans for Lisbon Growth and Jobs Strategy

The EC has adopted a package of actions to help Europe's economy recover and to reinforce the Lisbon Growth and Jobs Strategy. The approach in the New Year will involve country chapters assessing Member States' progress in implementing the Lisbon Strategy. Member States will submit updated stability or convergence programmes by the end of the year.

A series of reports relating to the economic recovery aims were also adopted recently. Among these is a report on the implementation and future priorities of the Community Lisbon Programme, and a Communication on education and training that sets out both immediate priorities for co-operation for the years 2009-2010 and long term strategic challenges.

Further Information

EC press release IP/08/1987 of 16 December 2008 is available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/>

Intelligent Transport Systems Action Plan launched

The EC recently took a major step towards the deployment and use of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) in road transport. ITS can significantly contribute to a cleaner, safer and more efficient transport system. The action plan adopted in January puts forward a set of measures and a Directive laying down the framework for their implementation. Making transport greener, reducing congestion and saving lives on Europe's roads are high priorities for the EC. This initiative will therefore foster more efficient, safer and sustainable transport in Europe.

The plan provides the policy instruments to complement the work that the Intelligent Car initiative and the eSafety forum that aims to make cars safer, cleaner and smarter. The action plan proposes stronger European co-ordination of ITS and services in various Member States to accelerate the deployment of these systems across Europe.

Further Information

EC press releases IP/08/1979 and MEMO/08/789 of 16 December 2008 are available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/>

For more information on the ITS initiative please see: <http://ec.europa.eu/transport/its/>

Adoption of EU Maritime Transport Strategy 2018

The EC has adopted a Communication entitled 'Strategic goals and recommendations for the EU's maritime transport policy until 2018'. The strategic plan presents measures in response to the impact of the world economic crisis in the shipping sector, and explores the continuous performance of the maritime transport system and its contribution to sustainable development. The EU has the most strict maritime transport regulatory framework in the world.

The EC believes a strategic vision looking at the development of shipping, ports and related sectors for the short, medium and long terms is essential for streamlining the EU maritime transport policy so that it can best benefit from future opportunities and face the future challenges. Trends need to be considered such as the economic slowdown and impact on seaborne trade, piracy, climate change and other environmental concerns, volatility in energy markets, ports' capacity and, above all, human resources. The EC's strategic review and proposed actions will be discussed with all relevant key stakeholders at a European conference in the first half of 2009 on the future of maritime transport and maritime professions in Europe.

Further Information

EC press release AGENDA/09/1 of 9 January 2009 is available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/>

EC publishes strategy plans for agricultural research agenda

The EC has published the final version of its plans for developing an agricultural research agenda. The EC Communication entitled 'Towards a coherent strategy for a European Agricultural Research Agenda will be based on the following main areas: the global context; new priority areas, including climate change and energy; strengthening the production and sharing of agricultural knowledge in Europe; consolidating joint research programming for better governance of the European agro-food system; developing a mechanism for foresight monitoring; and Europe's responsibilities in a globalised world.

The plans are accompanied by a Staff Working Paper, which sets out more specific details of the basis and planning of the strategic plans. Included in the paper are tables to explain the co-ordination between research funders in the domain of agriculture related research in the EU, a list of Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) Collaborative Working Groups and an overview of the agri-food research systems in European countries.

Further information

The EC Communication is available at:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0862:FIN:EN:PDE:>

The Staff Working Document is available at:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st17/st17489-ad01.en08.pdf>

First European SME week

The EC is organising the first ever European SME Week from 6 - 14 May 2009. The SME week is an umbrella campaign aiming to promote entrepreneurship and inform entrepreneurs about support that is available to them at European, national and local level. The week-long event will see a series of smaller events organised by public administrations, business organisations and SME support providers throughout Europe.

SME week is being co-ordinated by DG Enterprise and Industry, but a total of 34 countries will be taking part in it, organising hundreds of events across Europe. The events range from conferences to networking events, and company open days to competitions. They will cover topics such as entrepreneurship, innovation, research, environment, growth, business support, business strategy

and creative thinking. A map is included on the website of the SME week and this lists all of the events taking place in each country throughout Europe.

Further information

The SME week website is available at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policy/entrepreneurship/sme-week/>

Launch of the 2009 International Year of Astronomy

On 7 January, the EU Commissioner for Science and Research, Janez Potočnik, inaugurated the European launch of the IYA2009, organised under the Czech Presidency of the EU. During his opening speech, Potočnik highlighted the EU's leading position in all fields of astronomy and outlined the EC's role in supporting research infrastructures in the field of astronomy.

The official launch of the International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009) took place on 15 - 16 January at UNESCO in Paris. The 2009 theme, entitled 'The Universe - Yours to discover', involved more than one hundred countries, and is expected to stimulate worldwide interest in astronomy and science. On 16 January, Professor David Southwood, Director of ESA's Science and Robotic Exploration programme presented the future scientific missions currently being studied within the framework of ESA's Cosmic Vision.

During the two day opening the general public was able to visit two scientific attractions that have been produced in co-operation with ESA: the Planck Dome exhibition and a travelling Herschel Discovery Truck. Visitors were able to learn more about the Planck and Herschel astronomy missions, planned for launch in 2009. Using revolutionary instruments, these two satellites will investigate how the first galaxies and stars formed and evolved. The aim of these key ESA missions is to provide new insights about the origins of the universe.

Further information

Further details of the opening ceremony, the IYA2009 and details of ESA's participation in IYA2009 throughout the year can be found on: http://www.esa.int/esaCP/SEM6TAVPXP/index_0.html

The speech is available on Commissioner Potočnik's website:

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/EC_barroso/potocnik/indexfl_en.htm

Atlas of satellite photos helps cities plan

For the first time, the EC and EU Member States have worked together to produce an 'Urban Atlas'. This atlas, which was produced using European space technology, contains information about 185 cities from all 27 EU Member States. The urban atlas has been put together from thousands of satellite photographs, and will provide reliable information for urban planning. It provides detailed digital mapping, which will allow city planners the most up-to-date and accurate information on land use and land cover. It therefore aims to help towards safe, sustainable and prosperous development within European cities. Urban planners will for example be able to better assess risks and opportunities, such as the threat of flooding. They will also be able to identify new infrastructure and public transport needs.

The Urban Atlas is part of the implementation of the Global monitoring of Environment and Security (GMES) service and was financed through the European Regional Development Fund. Because of economies of scale, the mapping costs using this technology are at least ten times cheaper than other mapping methodologies. By 2011, the aim is that all cities in the EU will be covered by this Urban Atlas.

Further Information

EC Press Release IP/09/65 of 16 January 2009 is available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid>

Further information on GMES is at: <http://ec.europa.eu/gmes>

European attitudes to science

A new study has been published assessing the attitudes of European citizens to science and research policy. Europeans place high value in the science, acknowledging the value to society of new discoveries and improved education. However, there are also general misgivings about the potential harm that science can cause, in terms of environmental damage and genetic engineering. The study also reveals broad support for more European co-operation in health, environment and security research.

European Commissioner for Research, Janez Potočnik, was pleased with the results of the survey. He said, 'European citizens believe in science as a tool of progress and support a more cooperative European approach to science and technology policy. Pooling brains and resources is key to make the EU competitive globally: we are more intelligent together than on our own.' The study also found that many citizens feel that their own country is not doing enough research compared to other parts of Europe. This attitude was particularly pronounced in Eastern and Southern states, and less noticeable in Northern countries such as France, Germany and the UK. People surveyed generally agreed on the need for a unified European policy on science and research, and there is general understanding that this will help Europe to remain competitive with countries such as Japan and the USA, and reduce the loss of skills to these countries through the 'brain drain'.

Further information

EC press releases IP/08/1711 and MEMO/08/711 of 14 November 2008 are available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid>

Call opens under Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership scheme

The British Council has announced a call for proposals under the new Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership. The aim of the scheme is to strengthen academic cooperation between universities in the UK and Israel through the awarding of grants for joint research in all fields of science. This includes scientific research in both pure and applied science and it also covers social sciences and humanities.

Grants are available for teams to implement joint research or carry out research planning. There are also a limited number of grants available for eligible individuals to undertake research placements at partner institutions in the UK and Israel. Applications are encouraged from research teams who can demonstrate that they are developing an important and innovative line of research, with the potential to make a significant difference in their field or across disciplines.

Further information

Full details of the call for proposals, guidelines for applicants and application forms are available at: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/israel-birax-call-for-proposals-2.htm>

For any questions please contact the British Council Israel office: science@britishcouncil.org.il
Tel: 972 3 6113626

Research News

FP6 research could lead to improvements in arthritis treatment

UK researchers have discovered that the joint damage caused by rheumatoid arthritis could be caused partly by antibodies produced within the joints themselves. The discovery helps to explain why drugs that clear antibody-producing B-cells from the bloodstream do not always lead to improvements in the arthritis. The research demonstrated the mechanism for the production of anti-citrullinated protein/peptide antibodies (ACPAs) which those with rheumatoid arthritis often produce. This in turn provided evidence of the crucial role of 'activation induced cytidine deaminase' (AID) in the pathogenesis of the arthritis.

The researchers from the London School of Medicine and King's College London are part of a five-year project with almost €12 million under the Life Sciences, Genomics and Biotechnology for Health theme of FP6. The Innovative Chemokine-based Therapeutic Strategies for Autoimmunity and Chronic Inflammation (INNOCHEM) project focuses on the development of the therapeutic strategies for autoimmunity and chronic inflammation.

Further information

Further information on the project is available at:

http://cordis.europa.eu/search/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.document&N_RCN=30335

FP7 HERMES project helps the elderly cope with memory loss

The EU funded HERMES ('Cognitive care and guidance for active aging') project uses information and communication technology (ICT) to develop a user-friendly system that will both support older people when their memories fail and offer memory-boosting exercises. The ICT theme under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) has allocated €2.82 million to the project. Project partners, who include experts in gerontology, speech processing, hardware integration and user-centred design, are drawing on the latest in intelligent audio-visual processing and reasoning technologies to create a system ideally suited to people with mild to severe memory problems who may not be comfortable with new technologies or 'brain-boosting' devices.

In the HERMES system participants' homes are equipped with a computer, microphones and cameras that work together with a mobile phone to record conversations, events, location coordinates, dates and times. These devices ensure that information is recorded, after which it is stored, processed and analysed, allowing users to browse their past. Further, the system is designed to pick up on the users' daily routines and draw on these to remind them to carry out regular, daily tasks. In addition to retrieving relevant conversation and play it back to the user when requested, the HERMES system will offer a series of exercises to strengthen the user's memory, drawing on actual appointments and recorded memories to set the questions.

Further information

Further information is available at: <http://www.fp7-hermes.eu/>

Could laser driven fusion provide clean power from water?

Fusion energy would be an attractive, environmentally clean power source that would use water as its main fuel, producing no greenhouse gases or long-term radioactive waste. There are two main ways that fusion reactors might be achieved, either through 'magnetic confinement' (as will be used in the demonstrator International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor known as ITER) or through 'inertial confinement' using lasers.

The HiPER (High power laser for energy research) project brings together 26 partners from 10 countries and is dedicated to demonstrating the feasibility of laser driven fusion as a future energy source. The preparatory phase of HiPER is expected to last until 2011, and construction should be completed by 2020. HiPER is funded under FP7, and is one of the infrastructures that was identified on the 2006 'European Roadmap for Research Infrastructure' that was produced by ESFRI (the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures). As well as studying fusion energy, HiPER is also being designed to enable a broad array of new science to be studied including extreme material studies, astrophysics in the laboratory, miniaturised particle accelerators and a wide range of fundamental physics research. It will allow investigation of some of the most extreme conditions found in the universe such as conditions in the centre of the sun, or in an exploding supernova. Inside HiPER the temperatures will reach hundreds of millions of degrees, the pressure will be billions of atmospheres, and enormous electric and magnetic fields will be generated.

Further Information

The HiPER website is at: <http://www.hiper-laser.org>

Sign up for future updates about HiPER at: <http://www.hiper-laser.org/subscription.asp>

Information on ESFRI is at: <http://cordis.europa.eu/esfri>

Stomach bug gives clues to migration in the Pacific region

Researchers funded under FP6 have analysed the genetic sequence of bacteria found in the stomachs of native people in the Pacific to shed light on how and when humans colonised this large diverse region. When the first humans left Africa 60,000 years ago they had the *Helicobacter pylori* in their stomachs. Today half the world's population is infected with this bacteria and it has been linked to stomach ulcers and an increased risk of cancer. Different continents are home to different strains of the bacteria with people in Europe infected with a different strain to those in Asia.

By studying strains of the bacteria taken from native Pacific populations the researchers have discovered that there were two distinct waves of migration into the Pacific. First there were early migrations to New Guinea and Australia, and a much later dispersal from Taiwan through the Pacific by the Malayo-Polynesian-speaking Lapita culture. EU support for the study came from the PathoGenoMics (Trans-European co-operation and co-ordination of genome sequencing and functional genomics of human-pathogenic microorganisms) an ERA-NET project.

Further information

Further information is available at:

http://cordis.europa.eu/search/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.document&N_LANG=EN&N_RCN=30384

The PathoGenoMics website is available at: <http://www.pathogenomics-era.net/index.php>

Education, Training and Culture

Formal adoption of the second phase of Erasmus Mundus

The decision to establish the second phase of the Erasmus Mundus programme (2009-2013) has been formally reached between the EP and the European Council and published in the Official Journal of the EU. There are three actions associated with the new programme: action one is for joint masters and doctoral programmes, and a scholarship scheme; action two is for partnerships between European and non-European countries for structured cooperation, and exchange and mobility

schemes; finally action three is for the promotion of European higher education through measures to enhance the attractiveness of Europe as an educational destination.

The Erasmus Mundus II programme is the joint responsibility of EC Directorate-Generals for Education and Culture, and EuropeAid – Cooperation Office. The new phase of the Erasmus Mundus Programme builds on the previous programme, which ran from 2004 - 2008. This original programme focused on the masters' level and did not have support for the doctoral level which the new programme does.

Further information

Further information on Erasmus Mundus 2009-2013 is available at:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/mundus/erasmus_mundus_2009_2013_en.htm

Call under Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window

The EC has published a call for proposals for the implementation of Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window (EM ECW) in the academic year 2009-2010. EM ECW aims at mutual enrichment and better understanding between the EU and Third Countries. It is designed to foster institutional co-operation in the field of higher education between the EU and Third Countries through a mobility scheme addressing student and academic exchanges for the purpose of studying, teaching, training and research.

The EC will contribute to financing partnerships of European and Third-Country higher education institutions (and associations and networks of universities) with a grant that will cover: the costs of the organisation of mobility of higher education students and academic staff and; the costs of the implementation of individual mobility flows of higher education students and academic staff. This call is the third EM ECW call for proposals. The deadline for the submission of proposals is 13 March 2009 at the latest.

Further information

The guidelines for grant applicants and the relevant application form are available at the following website: <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/extcoop/call/index.htm>.

Vocational credit system and quality framework approved

The EP has approved amended versions of the EC's proposals for a Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Education and Training (EQARF). The ECVET aims to make it easier to transfer credits from one system to another and has been developed to be compatible with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) used in higher education. The EQARF is a new reference framework to help authorities in Member States promote and monitor the improvement of their vocational training systems. The framework includes ways to monitor the performance of a particular system.

For both of the proposals the EC recommends that the Member States are given the freedom to implement the proposals on a voluntary basis. This maintains the consistency with the approach taken by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) initiative. The EP voted in favour of both the proposals following some amendments. The proposals now need to be considered by the European Council but it is expected that they will be adopted within a single reading.

Further information

EC press release IP/08/2030 of 18 December 2008 is available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/>

EC outlines plans for boosting European co-operation in education and training

In December 2008 the EC presented its strategic vision for co-operation between EU Member States on the reform of their education and training systems. The EC feels that most problems in these areas need a European solution. In this context the EC identified a number of common challenges, such as skills deficits, ageing societies and foreign competition. In its vision, the EC outlined immediate priorities for 2009-2010 as well as long-term challenges.

Firstly, the EC feels that European education and training systems need reform to better prepare people to find jobs, to help businesses find the staff they need to succeed and innovate in the face of global competition. As the quality and efficiency of education systems play a key role in supporting social inclusion, lifelong learning must become a reality across Europe so that people can acquire key skills early and update them throughout their life. Secondly, the EC identified areas where EU countries are required to work together in order to exchange good practice and develop common tools. Some of these areas include a workforce that needs more of the right skills for tomorrow's jobs, ageing societies and foreign competition. Finally, the EC has defined joint targets to measure the progress made by education and training systems at European level. They will be reviewed on a regular basis and include the reading literacy of fifteen year-olds, early school leavers, and the participation of adults in lifelong learning.

Further information

EC press release IP/08/1986 of 16 December 2008 is available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/>

Three Latvian cities in the running for 'European Capital of Culture 2014'

A meeting of the selection panel for the European Capital of Culture 2014, which was held in Riga in December, determined that the three Latvian cities preselected and invited to develop their applications are Cesis, Liepaja and Riga itself. Both Latvia and Sweden are entitled to host a Capital of Culture in 2014 – the pre-selection in Sweden had already designated Lund and Umea as the cities to go forward from that country.

Jan Figel, responsible for education, training, culture and youth in the EC, said of the Latvian cities that they had 'invested heavily in the competition'. He went on to explain the benefits of their participation in the competition. 'This competition is an ideal opportunity for the applicant cities to rethink their cultural and urban development. That will enable them to derive maximum benefit from the process not only in terms of culture, but also in terms of socio-economic factors and tourism.' The preselected cities from Latvia and Sweden have until summer 2009 to complete their applications, before one city from each is officially designated as a European Capital of Culture by the EU Council of Ministers.

Further information

EC Press Release IP/08/1990 of 16 December 2008 is available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/>

External Collaboration

Opportunities for links with Canada and the USA in higher education

The EC has published calls for proposals for cooperation in higher education, training, and youth for Canada and higher education and vocational training for the USA (known as the Atlantis programme). Both programmes aim to promote mutual understanding with the two countries and the EU. This includes a broader knowledge of the respective languages, cultures, and institutions, and to

improve the quality of human resources in all the countries. For both calls the eligible applicants are higher education institutions and vocational education and training institutions. The USA programme also has scope for agencies, industry, and NGOs.

For the Canadian scheme there is only one type of action which is joint study and training programmes. This action provides support for consortia of institutions to carry out study and training programmes and to implement student and faculty mobility. However, in the USA programme there are three different types of action. The transatlantic degree consortium projects provide support for the implementation of a double or joint degree programme; the second action is the excellence in mobility projects which provide funding for transatlantic mobility not directly related to the award of a double or joint degree. The third action is policy-orientated measures designed to enhance collaboration in the higher education and vocational training field.

Further information

Further information on the EU-Canada Programme is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/eu-canada/index_en.html

Further information on the EU-USA Programme is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/eu-usa/index_en.html

Extension of agreements on S&T co-operation with the US and Russia

The EC and the US want to extend their Agreement on Science and Technology (S&T) for a further 5 years from 2008. The EC's proposal has been approved by the European Parliament Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE). The agreement still requires a Council decision and changes have been proposed to make the agreement more in line with FP7. Space, security and nanotechnologies have also been added to the list of sectors for co-operative activities. The original agreement was signed in Washington on 5 December 1997 and has been in force since October 1998. Both sides see the value of extending the agreement in order to continue to facilitate co-operation in common S&T priority areas.

The EC also wants to renew their Agreement on Science and Technology (S&T) with Russia for a further 5 years. The Commission's proposal has also been approved today by the European Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) and the agreement now requires a Council decision. The EU and Russia are keen to maintain the ongoing co-operation in particular for those activities which can only be undertaken with third countries on the basis of a co-operation agreement.

Further information

Further information on the US agreement is available at:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/file.jsp?id=5695442>

Further information on the Russia agreement is available at:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/file.jsp?id=5714292>

EU-Africa partnership website launched

The EC (DG Development) and the African Union Commission have launched a new website dedicated to the EU-Africa Partnership. The website offers information such as news and documents, a forum for debate on progress and future directions, as well as bringing together civil society organisations, experts, and decision makers. This joint portal is part of the Africa-EU strategic partnership. The partners involved are the African Union, with the involvement of the Permanent Mission of the African Union in Brussels, and the EU along with the involvement of the EU delegation to the African Union in Addis Ababa.

The website provides support to the follow-up of the 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy. This strategy defines the long-term policy orientations between the two continents. This is a strategy which is based on a shared vision and common principles. The main objectives include improving the Africa-EU political partnership and developing a people centred partnership. The first action plan developed by the strategy outlined eight areas for strategic partnership for 2008-10. The eighth area is 'science, information society, and space'.

Further information

Further information is available at: www.africa-eu-partnership.org

DG Research webpage on EU-India co-operation

The EC DG Research has set up a webpage to provide information and explain the activities with India in research and Science and Technology collaboration (S&T). You can find, for example, information on the eight FP7 seminars that were held, in the summer of 2008, in major cities in India to highlight the opportunities in FP7 for Indian scientists and research managers. Raising awareness of FP7 and explaining the practicalities of participation is a key factor in increasing the number of Indian participations in FP7 calls for proposals.

Key documents on research collaboration aims are made available to the public, including those from the India-EU Ministerial Science Conference in New Delhi 7-8 February 2008. The Agreement for scientific and technological cooperation between the EC and the Government of the Republic of India and its accompanying Impact Assessment of the S&T agreement (October 2006) is also available. Regular S&T newsletters provide press coverage and news updates of the main developments in S&T policy and co-operation; and special news features. Links and other resources are available from the page and can be used to find further information.

Further information

The DG Research page on EU-India collaboration can be found at:
<http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/index.cfm?lg=en&pg=india>

The list of Third Country National Contact Points (currently two Indian NCPs are listed for the ICT programme) is available at: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/third-countries_en.html

Events and Awards

Conference on facing global challenges: European strategies for Europe's Universities

The fifth European University Association (EUA) convention will be hosted by the Charles University in Prague, in the Czech Republic, from 18-21 March 2009. The event takes place just before the formal launch of the European Higher Education Area in 2010 and at a time of reflection on the shape of the European Research Area (ERA) in the next decade. It therefore presents a major opportunity for universities to contribute to the debate by outlining their common vision of how best to promote a coherent, transparent and attractive university sector in Europe. Discussions will cover: promoting responsive and flexible universities; enhancing the role of universities as research institutions; addressing the growing complexities of governing and managing universities; and promoting the global outreach of European universities and enhancing their interaction with the rest of the world.

The objective is to influence the priorities set for the Bologna process post 2010 and to ensure that the specific concerns of universities are properly taken into account in the conditions set for the further construction of the European Research Area. To do this, university leaders present at the Convention will be asked to contribute to identifying '10 theses' for the future of European higher education and research as we look forward to 2020.

Further Information

The conference website is at: <http://www.eua.be/prague>

Conference on structuring the European Research Area

A conference on the role of basic research in the process of structuring the European Research Area (ERA) will be held from 16 to 18 April 2009 in Prague, Czech Republic. The conference will be organised by the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, and takes place under the current Czech Presidency of the EU.

The formation of the ERA is a process launched by the EU at the beginning of the decade. The process and concept are periodically refined through initiatives, recommendations and papers, most recently by 'Vision 2020' for the ERA, which was adopted by the European Council in December 2008. This founding text makes the ERA an area of freedom and exchange for scientists and aims to create the framework for the free movement of researchers and their work in a European area without borders to promote the spread of knowledge. The conference in April will contribute to the discussion. Target participants include European and international research stakeholders, research organisations, science foundations, EC representatives and other policy makers.

Further information

Further information is available from the conference website at: www.era2009.cz

Patinnova 2009 and European inventor of the year 2009 conference

The European Patent Forum, Patinnova 2009 and the European Inventor of the Year awards conference will be held from 28 - 30 April 2009 in Prague, Czech Republic. The conference is co-organised by the European Patent Office and the EC with the support of the Industrial Property Office of the Czech Republic. The European patent forum and Patinnova 2009 conference, the first of its kind to focus on IP in rapidly developing industries, will bring together applicants, patent attorneys, innovation stakeholders and experts from research and politics. The first day of this unique three-day event will focus on the system's role in the knowledge society, while the second and third days will be dedicated to policy issues and current legal and business practice.

Now in its fourth year, the European Inventor of the Year award ceremony will be held in conjunction with the European Patent Forum and PATINNOVA 2009 and will honour outstanding inventors in the following categories: 'Industry', 'SME/Research', 'Non-European countries' and 'Lifetime achievement'. This year the gala and award ceremony will take place at Prague Castle on 28 April 2009.

Further information

Further information is available from the conference website: http://www.csvz.cz/foreign/info-08/Patent_F.htm

New Publications and Online Resources

New database to bring stem cell researchers together

A new database has been created as part of the European Federation for Systematic Stem Cell Biology (EuroSyStem), to help improve collaboration between stem cell researchers. The database is called Stemdirect, and is currently being developed. It will be available online for free.

EuroSyStem is an FP7 funded project under the Health theme. The aim of the project is to interlink contemporary expertise and skills in stem cell research to drive forward progress in this area of research across Europe. To help achieve these aims, EuroSyStem is mapping stem cell activities across Europe to develop a smart contact database of active stem cell researchers. Stemdirect is aimed at helping researchers in the field to network with each other as efficiently as possible. The database will be available to the stem cell community and will feature both a quick search function and a more advanced search taking in specific research and expertise areas.

Further information

To sign up for Stemdirect: www.stemdirect.net

Further information is available at: <http://www.eurosystemproject.eu/>

Catalogue of environment and nano projects

The EC has recently published a catalogue of projects expected to be funded by the 2008 FP7 Environment Call (FP7-ENV-2008-1). The deadline for the call was February 2008. The catalogue also includes information on projects to be funded under the joint call that took place between the Environment and Nanosciences, Nanotechnology, Materials and New Production Technologies (NMP) themes, which was held on the subject of nanotechnologies for water treatment.

The catalogue includes information on the proposals likely to be funded, including the abstracts and institutions involved. It lists over seventy proposals and also includes details of the total EC contribution for each project and the type of project that it is. It may be of use to those applying to future calls who are interested in other projects funded and running simultaneously in their area.

Further information

The catalogue is available at: ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/environment/docs/catalogue-projects-fp7envnmp_en.pdf

CIP: InnovAccess launches new website

InnovAccess, the information website of the network of the National Patent Offices to assist with general intellectual property (IP) issues in Europe, has launched a new website with a new user layout. The launch of the new and updated InnovAccess website follows the new IPR-Helpdesk website which was launched in November. Both websites are constituent parts of the IP Awareness and Enforcement: Modular Based Actions for SMEs (IPeuropAware) project, financed by the EC under the CIP programme.

The InnovAccess website includes two main sections on its front page. The first one entitled 'You have an idea' provides general information on IP and three useful tools, including a guide to choose the best mode of protection for your creations and inventions. The second section, 'Protect your creation in Europe', provides specific information for each country on the different IP protection procedures. This information is provided directly by National Patent Offices, the Office of Harmonisation for the Internal Market (OHIM) and the European Patent Office (EPO). The website

also provides access to the presentations from the recent seminar organised by IPeuropAware: 'IP Management and Enforcement: Good practices for SMEs'.

Further information

The InnovAccess website is available at: <http://www.innovaccess.eu/home.html>

New partner search tool for the EU public health programme

The EC DG Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) has launched a new partner search tool for the EU Health Programme. The new partner search tool will be managed by the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) (formally the Public Health Executive Agency (PHEA)) which is responsible for the implementation of the EU Health Programme and the EU Consumer Programme. The EU Health Programme gives much importance to ensuring that the funded projects involve diverse participants from different Member States. This is also an important criterion in the evaluation of the proposals and the award of the grants.

If you are looking for a partner, you can use this search facility and just fill in the online form to announce on their website that you are looking for a project partner. You can also browse through the proposals already posted or check their project database and contact details of project partners. The tool has been launched ahead of the next call, which is expected in spring 2009.

Further information

The partner search tool is available at:
<http://ec.europa.eu/eahc/management/finding.html>

Further information on the DG SANCO Public Health Programme is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_programme/pgm2008_2013_en.htm

Transport research projects highlighted

The EC has developed a new animated website to provide details of around sixty transport related projects funded in FP6. The website gives further details of around 15 projects in each of the four main modes of transport: road, rail, air and waterborne. Within each of these modes, they are then divided again into one of the following four objectives: safer transport, smarter transport, greener transport or more competitive transport.

Further information

The transport projects website is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/transport/more_info/multimedia/animation_en.html

CORDIS

CORDIS is the official Community Research and Development Information Service for science, research and innovation provided by the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. The interactive website offers daily news and detailed information on the EU's research programmes.

URL: <http://cordis.europa.eu>

IGLO Project Search

The IGLO Project Service offers a forum for publishing and disseminating details of proposed FP7 projects and/or research skills offered. The service enables 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 EU treaties and recent copies of the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJ). The OJ, published daily in 23 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 45 days following publication. (The OJ issue with the Euro exchange rates (L 359, 31/12/1998) is permanently available in PDF format on EUR-LEX).

URL: EUR-LEX <http://www.europa.eu/eur-lex>

Official Journals C and L <http://www.europa.eu/eur-lex/en/oj>

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

EUROPA

EUROPA is the official EU 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>

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://europa.eu/rapid>

cubed... from the British Council

cubed, the monthly webzine from the British Council discusses the science that's shaping our society and bringing a new dimension to everyday life. It brings the latest innovations in fashion and music, design and digital, film and life, and the products and ideas that will change our world.

Visit: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/science-cubed.htm>

Talking Science

Created by the British Council, the Talking Science website provides up-to-date information and links to the latest ideas in science communication in the UK: www.britishcouncil.org/talkingscience

GLOSSARY

Capacities

Capacities is the fourth Specific Programme of FP7 and is worth over €4 billion from 2007 to 2013. It aims to enhance research capacities throughout Europe and ensure their optimal use. It is made up of the following broad areas: Research Infrastructures; Research for the Benefit of SMEs; Regions of Knowledge; Research Potential for the Benefit of Convergence Regions; Science in Society; Support to Coherent Development of Research Policies; and International Co-operation.

<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/capacities>

CIP

The Competitiveness and Innovation Programme will run from 2007 to 2013. With a budget of €3.6 billion, it is made up of three Specific Programmes: the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme; the ICT Policy Support Programme; and the Intelligent Energy-Europe Programme

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/cip>

Co-operation

Co-operation is the first Specific Programme of FP7. Worth over €30 billion between 2007 and 2013, it is made up of ten thematic areas: Health; Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Biotechnology; Information Communications Technology (ICT); Nanosciences, Nanomaterials, Materials and New Production Technologies; Energy; Environment; Transport; Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities; Space; and Security.

<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/cooperation>

COST

European Co-operation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research is a framework for scientific and technical co-operation, allowing the co-ordination of national research on a European level.

<http://www.cost.esf.org>

'Council'

'Council' refers to the 'Council of Ministers', the principal 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://consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.ASP?lang=en

EC

The European Commission - made up of 27 commissioners nominated by the member states - both initiates proposals for EU legislation and executes EU policies and actions.

<http://ec.europa.eu>

EP

The European Parliament 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.europa.eu/news/public/default_en.htm

ERA

European Research Area. On 18 January 2000 the EC issued a communication entitled 'Towards a European Research Area' that proposed ways in which research in Europe could be more effectively organised and co-ordinated.

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/era>

ERC

The European Research Council, which is the Ideas Specific Programme of FP7, is worth over €7 billion from 2007 to 2013. New to the Framework Programme, the ERC will fund investigator-led, frontier research. It consists of two grant schemes, the Starting Independent Researcher Grant and the Advanced Investigator Grant.

<http://erc.europa.eu>

ESA

The European Space Agency is responsible for designing and developing the European space programme. The Agency's projects are designed to find out more about the Earth, its immediate space environment, the solar system and the universe, as well as to develop satellite-based technologies and services, and to promote European industries.

<http://www.esa.int>

ESC

The 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://eesc.europa.eu>

ESF

European Science Foundation

<http://www.esf.org>

ESF

The European Social Fund, part of the EU's Structural Funds

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf2000/index_en.html

ETP

European Technology Platforms are stakeholder groupings, led by industry, that help to define research and development priorities, timeframes and action plans on a number of strategically important issues.

http://ec.europa.eu/research/energy/nn/nn_rt/nn_rt_hlg/article_1262_en.htm

Euratom

The European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) was set up in 1957 and is legally separate from the European Community. Euratom will have €2.7 billion from FP7 to fund nuclear research and training activities between 2007 and 2011.

<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/euratom>

Eureka

Eureka is a Europe-wide network for industrial research and development.

<http://www.eureka.be>

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 then running from 2002 to 2006, and FP7 running from 2007 to 2013. The budget for FP7 is over €50 billion.

Further information on the thematic and horizontal programme composition of FP6 is available at: <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp6>

Further information on FP7 can be found at: <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7>

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.

ICPC

An International Co-operation Partner Country is an economically less developed country, which is not an EU member state or associated state. ICPC partners can participate in FP7 projects and receive funding.

Ideas

Ideas is the second Specific Programme of FP7 worth over €7 billion from 2007 to 2013. New to the Framework Programme, Ideas will fund investigator-led, frontier research. It is implemented through the European Research Council and consists of two grant schemes, the Starting Independent Researcher Grant and the Advanced Investigator Grant.

<http://erc.europa.eu>

ITRE

The European Parliament Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy (FP7)

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/itre_home_en.htm

JRC

The EC's Joint Research Centre acts 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>

LLP

The Lifelong Learning Programme is made up of four pillars: the Comenius programme for pupils, teachers and schools; the Erasmus programme for students, scholars, professors and universities; the Leonardo da Vinci programme for apprentices, workers and employees; and the Grundtvig programme for adults and teachers and related organisations. There is also a transversal programme (for policy development, languages, information and communication technology) and the Jean Monet programme (dealing with issues relating to European integration, European institutions and associations in the fields of education and training).

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/llp/index_en.htm

MEDIA

The MEDIA Programme aims to strengthen the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry.

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/avpolicy/media/index_en.html

NATO

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

<http://www.nato.int>

People

The third Specific Programme of FP7 is worth over €4 billion during the period from 2007 to 2013. Made up of the Marie Curie Actions, it aims to improve the quality of human resources in European research through training and trans-national mobility of researchers.

http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/people/home_en.html

RTD

Research and Technological Development

SICA

Specific International Co-operation Actions are FP7 call topics where a partner from an ICPC country has to be involved.

SME

Small and medium sized enterprises

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/sme_definition/index_en.htm

Specific Programme

FP7 is made up of seven Specific Programmes: Co-operation; Ideas (implemented through the European Research Council); People (the Marie Curie Actions); Capacities; the Joint Research Centre (JRC); Euratom and the JRC implementing Euratom.

SSH

Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities is the eighth theme of the FP7 Co-operation Specific Programme.

Treaty of Amsterdam

The Treaty of Amsterdam was signed in October 1997 and entered into force on 1 May 1999.

<http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/en/treaties/index.htm>

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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