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# Brussels News Update May 2007

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### EIT - Smaller and Slower

The informal Competitiveness Council has backed a German Presidency initiative on gradual progress towards a European Institute of Technology and urged the Commission to quickly submit a convincing and concrete funding proposal for the institute.

The informal Competitiveness Council on 27-28 April supported a German Presidency initiative, which proposes establishing only two Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KIC) at first and others later once the projects have proven efficient. The Commission's proposal to make climate change and energy-efficiency research priorities of the first KICs was widely supported by the member states.

The smaller and slower Presidency proposal also means a substantial cut in the initial budget of €2.4 billion to €600 million, but this would be reviewed depending on the success of the first KICs. The Presidency also wants to see long term funding in place and urged the Commission to "quickly submit a convincing and concrete funding proposal" for the EIT.

It was also agreed that the EIT will not award its own postgraduate masters or doctoral degrees, but would apply an 'EIT label' to the degrees awarded by participating universities.

Meanwhile, an independent UN expert group dismissed the Commission's proposal for a decentralised, virtual European Institute of Technology (EIT). Instead, they propose an alternative 'Cluster EIT' model built on existing local and regional strongholds in research, education and innovation.

Political agreement at the Council is now expected by July 2007 with legislation adopted by end of the year 2007. This would mean that the decision on the first KIC could be taken by mid-2008 and the first KIC could be operational by early 2009.

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/education/ministers-approve-slow-motion-technology-institute/article-163452>

German EU Presidency Press Release:

[http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Press\\_Releases/April/0427Schavan.html](http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Press_Releases/April/0427Schavan.html)

Commission – EIT: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eit/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eit/index_en.html)

United Nations University – Feasibility Assessment:

[http://www.merit.unu.edu/publications/docs/200704\\_EIT.pdf](http://www.merit.unu.edu/publications/docs/200704_EIT.pdf)

## EuCheMS debates sustainable energy solutions

EuCheMS held a one-day seminar on 'Europe's Energy Policy - the role of Chemistry' in Brussels in April.

Speaking at the seminar, Pia Locatelli MEP, member of the European Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), welcomed the contribution of EuCheMS to the debate on sustainable energy solutions and agreed that chemistry has an important role to play.

Representatives of the European Commission, chemical societies and chemical industry organisations, as well as other interested groupings, participated in the first EuCheMS energy event in Brussels.

José Fluxa Garcia from DG TREN in the European Commission opened the morning seminar session with a description of the new European Strategic Energy Plan (SET).

Professor Vincenzo Balzani, University of Bologna, gave an excellent presentation on the opportunities and challenges for Europe in leading the world in finding sustainable solutions to the energy crisis, saying that 'finding a breakthrough is indeed the grand challenge of chemistry'.

Professor Wolfram Koch, Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker, illustrated the significant contributions that chemistry will make to meeting future energy needs.

In the afternoon workshop RSC Chief Executive Dr Richard Pike chaired a brainstorming session on ways in which the chemical sciences will provide clean, affordable and secure energy in the long-term.

Copies of the presentations and briefing notes are available on the EuCheMS web site [www.euchems.org/Divisions/ChemistryEnergy/Events.asp](http://www.euchems.org/Divisions/ChemistryEnergy/Events.asp)

## European Research Area – Green Paper

First proposed by the Commission in 2000 as a European 'internal market' for research, the European Research Area (ERA) has yet to achieve its full potential, the Commission has acknowledged in a Green Paper on new perspectives for the European Research Area (ERA).

A true ERA would allow free movement of researchers, technology and knowledge between the EU-27 and put an end to fragmentation/duplication of research, thus contributing to more efficient use of funds available for research. The Green paper calls for new member state funding for research and raises a number of questions on how to deepen and widen the ERA so that it fully contributes to the renewed Lisbon Strategy.

The main issues for consultation, set out in the Green Paper are:

- Removing the institutional and national barriers hampering free movement of researchers;
- improving their working conditions and widening their career prospects;
- developing world-class research infrastructures together to share the extremely high building and operating costs;
- strengthening universities and public research organisations by increased autonomy and funding;
- increasing access to knowledge by sharing research results and improving knowledge transfer between public research and industry;
- optimising research programmes by making national and regional research more coherent and joint priority setting, and;
- opening ERA to the world by increasing international research co-operation.

The consultation on future ERA will be opened on 1 May-31 August 2007 and a conference on the results of the consultation will take place end of 2007. The Commission will propose new initiatives for ERA in 2008.

Commission Green Paper: The European Research Area:

[http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/era\\_gp\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/era_gp_final_en.pdf)

Cordis News:

[http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN\\_NEWS\\_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=3&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1177940287524&RCN=27584](http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=3&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1177940287524&RCN=27584)

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/european-research-area-relaunched/article-163035>

## Huge Demand for First ERC Starting Grants

A massive 9167 proposals have been submitted by young researchers to this call for ERC Starting Independent Investigator Grants (ERC Starting Grants), but the first call only has funding for up to 250 grants. The ERC Scientific Council has also released the names of the top scientists and scholars who are members of the peer review Panels that will be responsible for evaluating these proposals.

Prof Fotis Kafatos, ERC President, said "We are very pleased with this powerful message of support for the ERC and its strategy. The high response rate is a clear signal of the expectations and interest in the ERC by Europe's young scientists and a measure of the need for grants of this kind in Europe."

The budget for the call, which covers all areas of research is approximately €290 m, which should result in around 200-250 substantial grants.

A significant proportion of the proposals are highly interdisciplinary, according to their main scientific focus, the breakdown of proposals received is approximately as follows:

- Physical sciences and engineering: 46%
- Life science including medicine: 37%
- Social sciences and humanities: 17%

Successful applicants at the first stage, which will be completed by July 2007, will be invited to submit more detailed proposals for the second stage evaluation that will take place in autumn 2007, allowing the first awards to be made before the end of the year.

ERC: <http://erc.europa.eu>

## New Intellectual Property Charter

The German Presidency has urged public-research institutions and universities to professionalise their management of intellectual property and proposed the establishment of a specific European Charter for this purpose.

A European Charter for the management of intellectual property from public research institutions and universities would be designed as a voluntary code of conduct for collaboration between research institutions and industry.

Overall, the charter aims to raise general awareness on the importance of deliberate and professional management of intellectual property. The aim is to encourage member states to support the establishment of principles for the proper management of IP and to push public research institutions and universities to professionalise their management of IP in accordance with the standards proposed by the charter.

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/ip-charter-manage-public-private-research-operation/article-163441>

German EU Presidency - Presidency Key Issues Paper:

[http://www.bmbf.de/pub/Eckpunkte\\_IP\\_eng\(2\).pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/Eckpunkte_IP_eng(2).pdf)

## R&D Subsidies for Large Companies

The Commission has proposed new 'block exemption' rules, that would extend research and development state aid, currently reserved only for SMEs, to large enterprises as well. The new rules would, for example, allow subsidies of up to 50% of companies' project costs for industrial research (60-70% for SMEs), and up to 25% for experimental development (35-45% for SMEs). Subsidies exceeding these ceilings would still need to be notified to the Commission.

The draft regulation will be discussed with member states in early 2008, with the Commission hoping to adopt the final regulation before summer 2008.

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/eu-allow-rd-subsidies-large-companies/article-163427>

Commission press release:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/549&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

## Stem-Cell Ethics

The European Parliament has backed a compromise package on a proposed EU regulation on advanced therapies for example, from human embryonic stem cells, where the decision is left to member states.

The regulation will create a single European regulatory framework and a single European marketing authorisation for gene therapy, cell therapy and tissue engineered products.

Euractiv.com <http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/eu-leaves-decision-stem-cell-ethics-member-states/article-163378>

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/eu-leaves-decision-stem-cell-ethics-member-states/article-163378>

Commission press release:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/566&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

## Biotechnology Strategy Mid-Term Review

The Commission has published a mid-term review of the Strategy on Life Sciences and Biotechnology. The review reflects on progress made so far and refocuses the action plan on five priority themes: research, innovation, ethical issues, agriculture and the implementation of the strategy.

The review notes that the three main constraints on innovation are Europe's fragmented patent system, the insufficient supply of risk capital and shortcomings in the cooperation between science and business.

With this in mind, the Commission pledges to develop best practices in the responsible licensing of genetic inventions, and encourages Member States to consider setting up specific rules or incentives for young, innovative companies.

The Commission also wants to encourage 'informed societal debates' on the benefits and risks of biotechnologies. In its action plan, the Commission proposes the establishment of an institutionalised interface where stakeholders will be able to debate the pros and cons of biotechnology.

European Research Ministers will be asked to endorse the review document in the next few months. The strategy itself is due to run until 2010.

Commission: [http://ec.europa.eu/biotechnology/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/biotechnology/index_en.htm)

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/europe-new-strategy-life-sciences-biotech/article-163094>

## University-Business Knowledge Transfer

The Commission has presented guidelines to help universities improve their links with industry and improve the exploitation publicly funded research results

"Making better use of publicly funded R&D is an important problem," states the Commission policy document. The Communication, argues that an average university in Europe generates far fewer inventions and patents compared with North American counterparts.

This is said to be largely due to "a less systematic and professional management of knowledge and intellectual property" in European universities. Other barriers include cultural differences between business and science communities, the lack of incentives for them to work together as well as legal barriers hindering co-operation.

A group of high-level industry and academic actors will be launched in 2007 to further reflect and develop guidelines and to provide advice on other possible actions to promote knowledge transfer in Europe.

Commission communication: Improving knowledge transfer between research institutions and industry across Europe: embracing open innovation - Implementing the Lisbon agenda:

[http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/com2007182\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/com2007182_en.pdf)

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/commission-urges-university-business-knowledge-transfer/article-163036>

## EU Patent Law Initiative

The Commission's new approach for a future patent system in Europe builds on proposals for a single EU-wide judiciary with competence for litigation.

The Commission communication is intended to "draw operational conclusions" from the Spring 2006 stakeholder consultation and to speed up the work in the Council on the Community patent and jurisdictional arrangements.

It proposes the creation of an integrated EU-wide jurisdictional system for patents, which would combine elements of both the draft European Patent Litigation Agreement (EPLA) aimed at reducing litigation costs and of specific Community jurisdiction for patent litigation based on the EC Treaty.

Member states have been divided between these two approaches to patent litigation and the Commission believes that consensus could be built on the basis of an integrated approach. "The way forward could be to reflect on the creation of a unified and specialised patent judiciary, with competence for litigation on European patents and future Community patents."

This system would set up a number of tribunals to handle patent disputes across the EU. Their responsibilities would include infringement-related claims whereas the appeals would be heard by one single court, for example the European Court of First Instance. The final judgement on patent jurisdiction would be provided by the European Court of Justice.

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/innovation/commission-bids-salvage-eu-patent-law/article-163024>

Commission press release:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/463&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

## Balanced Approach to Developing Nanotechnology

Speaking at a conference in Brussels on 17 April, EU Research Commissioner Janez Potocnik noted that one of the greatest challenges facing nanotechnologies is how best to join together the three sides of the triangle of knowledge.

This has been one of the goals of the Commission's 2005 action plan on nanotechnologies. 'We wanted to improve the field from start to finish by fostering innovation; increasing investment; boosting inter-disciplinarity; creating the necessary infrastructures and expanding human resources,' said the Commissioner.

The Commissioner also pointed to the need to further identify safety concerns; collect more data for health and environmental impact assessments of products, and act at the earliest possible stage through adjustments, where necessary, of risk assessment procedures for nanotechnology.

The European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies is currently working to provide ethical guidelines on nanomedicine. The Commission has also expanded funding for projects assessing the risk of nanotechnology for humans and the environment within the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7).

In addition, the Commission is looking at the European legislation applicable to nanotechnology. 'We are assessing how adequate and appropriate it is to deal with the increasing use of nanotechnologies. We also need to consider potential regulatory issues,' said Mr Potocnik.

Cordis News:

[http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN\\_NEWS\\_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=5&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1177940287524&RCN=27537](http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=5&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1177940287524&RCN=27537)



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