European Association for Chemical and Molecular Sciences
Europäische Vereinigung für Chemische und Molekulare Wissenschaften
Association Européenne pour les Sciences Chimiques et Moléculaires
Европейская Ассоциация Химических и Молекулярных Наук

Brussels News Update December 2006

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FP7 Final Approval – Call Launched

The EU Council of Ministers has given final approval to FP7, the EU's biggest-ever research and technology programme. The budget of EUR 54bn (including nuclear research) will lead to a 75% increase in annual EU research funding by 2013. The Commission is expected to adopt the work programmes and publish the first calls for proposals on 22 December 2006. Chemistry is well represented in the programme with opportunities in almost all of the nine thematic priorities.

The Commission's official proposal for the EU's 7th Framework Programme (April 2005) generated a broad consensus. The only controversial issues in the debate that followed were the overall budget, EU funding for stem-cell research and how much money should be allocated to nuclear and renewable energy research. After 19 month of negotiations and 2000 amendments, the European Parliament gave final approval on 30 November, and the Council will now give the final seal of approval.

Speaking after the parliamentary approval last week Research Commissioner Jan Potočnik said the major changes compared with FP6 are the European Research Council (ERC), which "brings new logic into ERA", referring to the fact that funding and other decisions by ERC will be taken by scientists only. This means that no political considerations will be taken into account when deciding on allocation of the ERC funds. "I think this is a major step forward for Europe and I hope this kind of new logical approach will bear fruit also in other discussions in other areas," added Potočnik.

He also said that the current technology platforms "have great potential to go beyond the framework programme and will be a major source of how we want to direct our funding in the co-operation programme".

The wording in the new programme provides a good basis for chemistry in the work programmes. FP7 has been developed with input from a number of technology platforms, including SusChem on sustainable chemistry, in which both GDCh and RSC are partners. The European Technology Platform for Sustainable Chemistry (SusChem) was initiated in 2004 to produce a European research strategy in the areas of chemistry and industrial biotechnology. Backed and funded by the European Union Commission under the Framework Programme 6, SusChem was set up jointly by the European Chemical Industry Council (Cefic) and the European Association for Bioindustries (EuropaBio).

The SusChem implementation action plan (IAP) outlines key research areas where chemistry can improve its environmental and economic sustainability, and SusChem now hopes to focus European spending in chemical research and development into those fields. Three visionary projects – including a 'smart energy home' and improved biorefineries – are helping to shape specific project proposals that could request funding from the FP7.

Whilst the Commission's original proposal was cut by a third, the FP7 budget still represents a 40% yearly increase in real terms (75% in 2013) compared with FP6. The information and communication technologies is a big winner in the FP7, as the budget of the thematic ICT programme represents one fifth (€9 billion) of the total FP7 budget (€50.5bn). The Commission says that this is justified, as the ICT is a key enabling- technology for innovation in many other areas and, therefore, perfectly fits the EU's Lisbon Agenda.

With regards the part of energy research, "we have three main priorities", said the Parliament's FP7 rapporteur Jerzy Buzek. "The most important is energy efficiency. The others are renewables and clean coal and carbon-capture related research. Half of the energy budget (€2.35bn) will be allocated to efficiency and renewables and the other half for clean coal technologies," he added.

The environment research thematic programme, including climate change, has a comparatively small share of funds - €1.9bn for seven years. However, the Commission says that the issue will not be addressed only in this thematic priority but horizontally across many other priorities, such as transport or energy.

As to the funding of stem-cell research, the FP6 rules will continue to apply, but an extensive Commission declaration on the ethical framework of this type of funding will be published in the Official Journal as part of the FP7 package. It namely prohibits the destruction of embryos solely for the purposes of research or stem cell procurement.

The Council is to finally adopt FP7 on 5 December 2006 and the Commission is expected to adopt the work programmes and publish the first calls for proposals on 22 December 2006.

Sources:
Cordis http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/
DG Research http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/home_en.html
SusChem http://www.suschem.org/

REACH – Final Approval Close

A compromise deal was achieved on 30 November between the European Parliament, Council and Commission. Given the declared support of Parliament's three largest political groups, the centre-right EPP-ED, the socialists and the liberal democrats (ALDE), the compromise looks likely to be approved by a vote in the Parliament on 13 December and then forwarded to the EU Council of Ministers for final approval.

As Parliament's chief negotiator on REACH, Italian MEP Guido Sacconi admitted that he had to scale down his level of ambition following concerns by Germany and industry groups that the regulation would be too costly for the chemical sector. "Everyone should understand that it would be impossible to reach a better compromise," Sacconi said.

Central to the agreement is the conditions under which the most toxic substances are to be substituted for safer alternatives:

- Persistent and bioaccumulative chemicals (PBTs, vPvBs) are to be replaced whenever safer alternatives are available at an economic cost;
- Conditions are less stringent for carcinogens and mutagenic chemicals (CMRs), which will be authorised when producers can show that the risk they pose can be "adequately controlled". This means that scientists can agree on a "safe threshold" under which their presence in the human body is not considered to pose a health risk:
    - If a safer alternative exists, they will need to submit a substitution plan so that they are eventually replaced;
    - If a safer alternative is not readily available, companies will need to produce an R&D plan for substitution at a later stage. However, substances toxic to reproduction (endocrine disrupters) are exempted from the clause. A review will take place six years after the regulation comes into force to take account of new scientific developments on the subject;
- Deadlines for substitution are to be decided on a case-by-case basis, for each substance, and;
- the registration process has been extended from 3 to 3.5 years to give industry more time to comply.

Substances produced or imported in smaller quantities (1-10 tonnes per year) were exempted from full health and safety tests in order to bring down costs for industry. But this will be reviewed after seven years.

To preserve confidentiality of sensitive business information, companies will be allowed to keep details confidential such as the full composition of a preparation, its precise use, tonnage and links with downstream users.

Sacconi did win concessions on oversight of the future chemicals agency to be established in Helsinki with two members will be appointed by Parliament and the agency's executive director will need to be confirmed after a hearing in Parliament.

Sources:
Commission (DG Enterprise) http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/chemicals/index.htm
Euractiv.com http://www.euractiv.com/en/environment/reach-compromise-fire/article-160203

State Aid for Innovation and R&D

Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes has presented plans to allow state funding for European innovation and research projects. State aid is prohibited under EU law unless it has been explicitly authorised by the Commission and is generally associated with older industries such as shipbuilding, coal and steel.

Under the new proposals, aid could be allowed for activities that address specific market failures hampering innovation. Projects could include aid for feasibility studies, for young innovative enterprises, for the loan of highly qualified personnel and for the development of innovation clusters. The reform is part of a wider package of state aid reforms

Source:
Euractiv.com http://www.euractiv.com/en/innovation/innovation-rd-get-state-aid/article-159904

First EU Defence R&D Programme

The EU's defence agency has launched its first-ever research programme which will look into technologies aimed at protecting EU troops against threats such as snipers, booby traps and improvised bombs.

The three-year Joint Investment Programme (JIP), co-ordinated by the European Defence Agency (EDA), is worth €54.2 million and involves 19 European countries. The programme is due to start on 1 January 2007. France, Germany and Poland will be the largest contributors but the UK will not be participating.

Unlike previous cooperation on European defence research and technology, which involved governments negotiating financial and industrial shares for each individual project, the JIP sets up a common budget to fund the whole programme.

In a globalised economy, industry is expected to follow the money and, unchanged, the trend is "towards a steady contraction of the European defence industry". To respond to this challenge, in the interests of both military capability and industrial policy, the report highlights the need for higher levels of European investment in defence, in particular in the field of R&D.

Sources:
European Defence Agency (EDA) http://www.eda.europa.eu/
Cordis
http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=9&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1165393815236&RCN=26648
Euractiv.com http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/eu-launches-defence-rd-programme/article-159660

Conference on Research for Sustainable Development in Europe

The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is organising a conference on research for sustainable development in Europe entitled 'Sustainable Neighbourhood - from Lisbon to Leipzig through Research (L2L)', which will take place from 8 to 10 May 2007 in Leipzig, Germany.

The aim of the conference is to position sustainability research as an engine for European competitiveness within the Lisbon Agenda. It will be a cooperative event between policy and scientific communities, which seeks to provide a forum to debate current research in this field, the interaction between policy, economic and research communities, as well as future research priorities.

The organisers are inviting proposals for oral presentations and posters for all areas. The deadline for submitting abstracts is 22 December 2006.

Sources:
Germany Federal Ministry for Education & Research – Fona initiative
http://www.fona.de/de/3_akteure/forum_2007/pdf/L2L_Call.pdf
Cordis
http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS&ACTION=D&DOC=3&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1165394096727&RCN=26602

New EU Task Force on Science Education

The European Commission has created an expert group to look into how best to support science education in Europe's primary and secondary schools.

The new group will formulate policy recommendations designed to improve the way that Europe approaches science teaching and so ensure that future generations are well equipped to live and work in a knowledge-based economy.

The group will be chaired by Michel Rocard MEP, former Prime Minister of France.

Sources:
Cordis
http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=FP6_NEWS&ACTION=D&DOC=3&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1165394164796&RCN=26724

Attracting Foreign R&D Investment

Europe wants to attract more foreign R&D investment, but is currently losing investment to US, China and India. Eurostat has published a number of indicators which give an initial picture of performance across the EU.

Malta, Austria and Latvia have the biggest percentage of their total gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) financed by foreign funds, while in absolute figures, the UK is by far the main EU destination for foreign research funding - €5.8 billion in 2003, followed by France (€2.9) and Germany (€1.2).

The Commission thinks that strengthening the human potential in research and technology in Europe and the creation of European poles of excellence can help attract more foreign research money.

Sources:
Euractiv.com http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/uk-top-destination-foreign-rd-investment/article-159798
Eurostat - Statistics in focus http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-NS-06-015/EN/KS-NS-06-015-EN.PDF

Greater Push for EU Competitiveness

The Commission's 2006 Competitiveness Report says that member states must invest in innovation as well as liberalise energy markets and cut red tape to boost growth and create jobs.

The report focuses on certain areas of key importance for driving Europe's ability to compete with the rest of the world and to reach its Lisbon goals of boosting growth and employment, including:

- increasing support for innovation, especially by facilitating access to venture capital;
- encouraging the emergence of lead markets that have chances of succeeding in a globalised economy;
- focusing R&D investment on high-growth industries where the EU remains strongly competitive, such as chemicals, pharmaceuticals, ICT, machinery and transport equipment, and moving away from areas where it has a serious competitive disadvantage compared with the rest of the world – such as wood, textiles, office machinery and communication equipment.

Sources:
Commission press release
http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1671&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en
Euractiv.com
http://www.euractiv.com/en/innovation/report-urges-greater-push-eu-competitiveness/article-160182

Note:
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Produced for EuCheMS by

Glenn Vaughan, EuCheMS European Policy Consultant
tel. +32 473 96.44.68 email. Glenn@GVCBrussels.eu

EuCheMS AISBL - Registered office Avenue E. Van Nieuwenhuyse 4, B-1160 Brussels