



Brussels News Update

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ERC Starting Grants

A total of 559 candidates have been selected from more than 9000 to go forward to the next stage of the evaluation process of the European Research Council's Starting Grants, targeting young researchers.

Full project descriptions will now be submitted by 17 September and the assessment process completed by end of the year. Around half are expected to win support.

A total of 45% of the 559 proposals are in physics, mathematics and engineering, compared to 37% in life sciences and 18% in social sciences and humanities. This mirrors the weight given to the fields in the original call for proposals.

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

Ideas Homepage Cordis: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ideas/home_en.html

Cordis News:

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=7&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1187618525377&RCN=28133

Commission Consultation: Responsible Nano Research

The European Commission has launched a consultation on responsible research in nanosciences and nanotechnologies.

The consultation is part of the Commission's plan to suggest that the EU Member States sign up to a Code of Conduct for this field. The consultation addresses a broad spectrum of society including the scientific community and industry, civil society, policy-makers, media and the general public.

Research Commissioner, Janez Potocnik stressed that the consultation demonstrates the Commission's commitment to 'developing the potential of nanosciences with appropriate safeguards'.

The principal concerns cover the ability of nanoparticles to cross natural bio-boundaries, and the prospect of connecting living creatures and human-made materials and systems.

The consultation will close on 21 September.

Commission consultation: <http://europa.eu/sinapse/directaccess/science-and-society/public-debates/nano-recommendation/>

Cordis:

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=14&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1187618525377&RCN=28083

Euractiv.com:

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/eu-adopt-nanotech-code-conduct/article-165727>

Ethics Group Opinion: Human Embryonic Stem Cell Use

The European Group on Ethics (EGE) in Science and New Technologies has issued an opinion setting out guidelines for use during the ethics review of EU-funded research projects involving human embryonic stem cells (hESC). But leading scientists have also called for a harmonisation of member state laws on stem cell research.

Under FP7 rules, applicants must prove that regulatory criteria are met and that hESCs come from non-implanted in vitro fertilisation (IVF) embryos. They must also set out how personal data will be protected along with information on the conditions of donation of the embryos.

In their report, the EGE experts recommend that in addition to the ethics rules already adopted by the European Parliament and Council, certain extra considerations be taken into account. These include the development of alternatives to hESCs, the rights of donors and national and international collaboration to minimise the use of hESCs.

Finally, the experts recommend that, under the FP7, funding should be provided in order to foster further collaborative and multidisciplinary international research on the ethical implications of hESC research.

Meanwhile, scientists have called on EU countries to remove political and legislative barriers to stem cell research, asking Germany and Italy in particular to drop threats of prison sentences against researchers that take part in European projects as ethical dilemmas remain concerning the status of the human embryo.

"Heterogeneity in Europe's stem cell politics and legislation seriously hinders the advancement of stem cell research and the sharing of biomedical knowledge. Obstacles to research in some partner countries, in particular Germany and Italy, create problems for the free circulation of ideas and people in the European Research Area", argue leading stem cell scientists in a statement sent to members of the European Parliament on 27 July 2007.

The scientists are calling for the harmonisation of current laws in the hope that their European counterparts are able to collaborate on international projects without fear of legal reprisal. The scientists also outline a series of specific requests to the governments of Italy and Germany.

EGE: http://ec.europa.eu/european_group_ethics/index_en.htm

Cordis:

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=18&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1187618525377&RCN=28047

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/scientists-press-eu-free-stem-cell-research/article-165938>

Portuguese Presidency Priorities

Portugal hopes to stimulate initiatives in three key areas during its stint in the EU's Presidency seat: publishing and scientific information; nanosciences and nanotechnologies; reform and modernisation of universities.

On publishing and scientific and technical information, the Presidency states that it will encourage a debate, focusing in particular on digital scientific libraries, involving all interested stakeholders. The debate will aim to establish mutual trust.

The prioritisation of nanosciences and nanotechnologies coincides with the mid-term review of a Commission strategy in this area, which is being prepared currently. The Presidency will 'highlight this field, stimulating in particular the coordination of national and European efforts and initiatives'.

On universities 'the Presidency will contribute to the process of the modernisation of higher education in Europe, focusing in particular on the opening, diversification and internationalisation of universities, in the context of advanced research and training networks,'.

Presidency: <http://cordis.europa.eu/portugal/presidency>

Cordis:

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=23&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1187618525377&RCN=28001

Research on Biofuel Technologies

Despite recent questions over the feasibility of biofuels, research into future biofuel technologies must go ahead with an integrated approach involving all stakeholders according to expert panellists at an international conference on biofuels, which took place in Brussels on 6 July.

A recent United Nations report warned that if badly managed, these fuels could cause serious damage to the environment and have an adverse impact on the lives of millions. One problem is that the crops needed to produce the fuel are competing with food crops for land, and could therefore jeopardise food supply. Growing biofuels crops has already led to large-scale deforestation in some areas of the world.

Panelists unanimously agreed that while research should focus on improving current first-generation biofuels and their management, ultimately these should not be perceived as the end to the solution. Instead they should be viewed as a stepping stone towards the next generation of biofuels.

Recognising the potential of second-generation biofuels, the US Government recently announced an investment of USD 375 million (€275 million) in three new research centres to accelerate the development of cellulosic ethanol, and other biofuels, using regional plants and crops. A further USD 1.3 billion (€950 million) will be spent over the next four years to build commercial-scale biorefineries and to launch pilot cellulosic biorefineries.

The European Biofuels Technology Platform is currently working on a draft research and development (R&D) strategic agenda that will be open to public consultation. The aim is to have an agenda ready for January 2008.

EU biofuels strategy: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/biomass/biofuel/index_en.htm

European Biofuels Technology Platform: <http://www.biofuelstp.eu>

Cordis:

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=24&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1187618525377&RCN=28002

Green Paper: Knowledge Gap on Climate Change

The European Commission has published a Green Paper outlining the EU policy areas where action is needed in order to minimise the threat of climate change in Europe. One of the areas listed is research and the need to address gaps in our understanding of global warming and its impact on the environment.

According to the Green Paper 'Adapting to climate change in Europe - options for EU action', early action could bring clear economic benefits by anticipating and minimising threats to ecosystems, human health, economic development, property and infrastructure.

The paper sets out four areas where early action can be taken at EU level. One of the areas listed is research and the need to address the complexity of interrelated factors surrounding climate change. The paper notes that there are several gaps in our understanding of the impact of climate change. To address these, the paper suggests the following actions:

- develop comprehensive and integrated methodologies for the assessment of impacts, vulnerabilities and cost effective adaptation;
- improve the basic understanding and prediction of impacts in Europe, including in the North Atlantic, the Arctic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea;
- clarify the expected impacts of climate change and ozone layer depletion on ecosystems and explore ways to enhance their resilience;
- develop long-term comprehensive and Europe-wide high resolution datasets and models;
- improve access to existing data and integrate data relevant for adaptation into INSPIRE (Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe), SEIS (Shared Environment Information System) and GMES (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security);
- improve knowledge on flows and availability of resources.

The three other policy areas identified by the Green Paper are: integrating climate change adaptation actions into existing and forthcoming legislation, policy responses and funding programmes; integrating global adaptation needs into the EU's external relations and building a new alliance with partners around the world; and setting up a European advisory group on adaptation to climate change to analyse coordinated strategies and actions.

Several workshops will be organised to discuss the content of the Green Paper, while a public consultation on the document is expected to be launched in November.

Green Paper: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/adaptation/index_en.htm

Cordis:

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=28&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1187618525377&RCN=27969

MEPs Call for Strong Renewables Policy

The Parliament's Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) Committee has given strong support to upcoming Commission proposals designed to increase the share of renewable energy in the EU's future energy mix.

On 10 July, MEPs in the ITRE committee voted in support of an own-initiative report presented by Danish Socialist MEP Britta Thomsen. While the report is non-binding and not connected with any existing legislative proposal, it provides an indication of how the Parliament may position itself with respect to the Commission's upcoming package of legislative proposals on renewables, expected in September 2007.

In a draft version of the report, nuclear energy was mentioned as a possible non-renewable yet low CO₂-intensive alternative to be considered in the overall policy framework. But reference to nuclear energy was deleted from the final report.

Fossil fuels were also mentioned in the report: MEPs support the idea of requiring a life cycle analysis and a "green certification" for fossil fuels, similar to certification requirements foreseen for biofuels.

Commission (DG TREN): http://ec.europa.eu/energy/res/index_en.htm

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/energy/meps-call-strong-eu-renewables-policy/article-165428>

Mobility of Scientists Still Limited

Recent EU-wide statistics show a limited share of non-nationals in science and technologies jobs and reveals big disparities between member states' ability to attract foreign researchers.

A Eurostat report on the mobility of science and technology workers found that an average 5.7% of human resources in research and technology (HRST) of the EU-27 are citizens of a foreign country, half of whom are citizens from other member states. The statistics, published in June 2007, show that there are large disparities in the share of these highly skilled people among EU countries.

In 2005, the Commission adopted a Recommendation on the European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for their recruitment to provide researchers with long-term career prospects by creating more favourable conditions for their mobility, in support of EU competitiveness. The Charter gives individual researchers the same rights and obligations, wherever they work in the EU.

These statistics and surveys suggest that the results of the Commission's initiatives to create favourable conditions for the mobility of researchers do not show results yet.

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/mobility-scientists-limited-study-shows/article-165758>

Wider Society Involvement 'Crucial'

EURAB has urged sustained engagement between researchers and societal actors as 'crucial' to transforming more research into innovation.

"Successful innovation will require not only the cooperation of academia and business, but also a close engagement with societal actors," states EURAB, in a recent report, 'Research and Societal Engagement'.

The report builds on the previous recommendations made by EURAB on the ways to encourage researchers to interact more with civil society and communicate science.

The report gives a set of recommendations to the research community on how to engage in a sustained dialogue with the public:

- universities should provide a structure to train and expose research students to different societal perspectives, encouraging engagement and a multi-disciplinary outlook;
- dialogue should be encouraged as a factor influencing a researcher's career prospects;
- development of further mechanisms for societal actors to improve their research capacities;
- expanding the role of societal actors in the European Technology Platforms;
- development of structures for partnerships between researchers and societal actors in the research dialogue, and;
- a strengthening of the research project evaluation, assessment and post-assessment processes by involving societal actors where appropriate.

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/wider-society-involvement-crucial-research-innovation/article-165209>



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