



Brussels News Update

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Competitiveness Council urges increased research spending and coordination

Ministers meeting at the EU's Competitiveness Council in February urge the EU to invest more in research, to facilitate the free movement of knowledge and to strengthen its innovation system. Member States are encouraged to set out how they will progress towards meeting national R&D investment targets when drafting their National Reform Programmes.

Ministers agreed that research infrastructures of pan-European interest should be strengthened, and that national strategies on developing research infrastructures should be

drawn up by the end of 2008. The Council urges higher education reforms, an increase in broadband penetration and the better management of intellectual property at universities.

Turning to innovation, the Council conclusions urge both the Community and the Member States to improve their coordination of efforts to better framework conditions for innovation. Initiatives include stronger science-industry linkages and support services for innovation and the development of clusters.

Source

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Council_Conclusions/February/0225_COMPE_T3.pdf

Link

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS&ACTION=D&SESSION=&RCN=29183

Strategic Energy Technology Plan Gets Green Light

The Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET-Plan) proposed at the end of 2007 has been endorsed by the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy (TTE) Council prior to the spring European Council meeting on 13 and 14 March 2008. A communication on the financing of the SET Plan is expected in November 2008. The plan supports the 20% targets by increasing the use of 'clean' or low GHG-emitting energy technologies and amongst its goals and key areas for action are:

1. Setting up priority Industrial Initiatives - voluntary, public-private partnership or joint programmes - by Member States. Areas of great potential, eg marine energy, energy storage and energy efficiency are to be examined.
2. Increasing efforts on energy efficiency by supporting and stimulating RDD&D on end-use technologies, raising awareness, standard setting and good use of public purchasing policy.
3. Setting up a "High Level Steering Group" by the summer of 2008 to establish communications and information exchange and to propose options for optimization of overall energy RDD&D efforts in the ERA.
4. Increasing in European and, when appropriate, national funding for energy RDD&D.
5. "Capacity building".

Sources

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<http://www.euractiv.com/en/climate-change/eu-climate-goals-get-national-backing/article-170650>

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/climate-change/financing-woes-plague-eu-climate-technologies/article-170573>

Commission planning new initiatives on energy efficiency in 2008

According to Pirjo-Liisa Koskimäki, the head of the Energy Efficiency Unit (D4) in the Commission's Directorate-General for Energy and Transport (DG TREN) in a recent interview, new initiatives regarding energy efficiency are on the way. Some legislation is in place like the ones on eco-design, buildings, co-generation and energy services, but full use of the legal framework is required so that the energy savings potentials are realised. This means, for instance, that the Commission will actively monitor and follow-up on the transposition of existing legislation.

The Commission will also provide support to member states in order to facilitate implementation, for instance via different information exchange projects under the Intelligent Energy Europe Programme. The National Energy Efficiency Action Plans should play a key role here, in guiding and developing these efforts.

The new Commission initiatives include work on improving the availability of financing for energy efficiency as well as focusing efforts on several international initiatives to address and strengthen the profile of energy efficiency, in addition to a re-cast of the energy performance of buildings directive and proposals for efficiency standards on street lighting, office lighting, stand-by appliances, external power supplies and set-top boxes.

Source

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/energy/commission-binding-energy-efficiency-targets-excluded/article-170529>

Member states outline research and innovation priorities

The Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry and Research) Council has adopted a key issues paper on competitiveness and innovation. The Council stresses the need for member states and the Commission to deepen their cooperation on knowledge, research and innovation to ensure better coherence between national research policies and contribute to the objectives of the re-launched Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.

Recommendations include increase of investment in higher-quality knowledge and innovation, ensuring the smooth functioning of the internal market, development of more strategic and better-structured joint research programmes, better promotion of the different instruments of the current EU research framework programme (FP7), implementation of already adopted research initiatives and programmes, such as Joint Technology Initiatives (JTIs), Galileo and the European Institute for Innovation and Technology (EIT).

Member states are asked to continue implementing their higher education reforms and universities modernization to enable them to "develop their full potential" as partners of the private sector in creating and using knowledge and innovation; and to improve the framework conditions for innovation in Europe by improving science-industry links and removing barriers to the creation of regional innovation clusters.

Source

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/intm/98919.pdf

Link

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/member-states-outline-research-innovation-priorities/article-170546>

Research infrastructure and the Lisbon objectives

The Lisbon objectives and how to achieve them were at the centre of the conference in Brdo, Slovenia, on "Research Infrastructures and their Structuring Dimension within the European Research Area" in March 2008.

Strengthening the European Research Area by improving the research infrastructure through active regional partnership is seen as the way to prevent the brain drain to the US, and leading to full exploitation of Europe's scientific potential. Particular emphasis was placed on the strategic distribution of research infrastructure across the whole territory of the EU.

The Commission presented a handbook for the best possible coordinated utilisation of various resources in developing research infrastructure at all three levels. It is intended to further promote development of regions in the area of science excellence.

A summary of the debate will be presented at the EU Council meeting and may serve as a basis for the conclusions of the Competitiveness Council scheduled for May.

Source

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0306MVZT_COMPET.html

Modernisation of Universities

Academic and industry representatives at the 2008 European Business Summit had agreed upon the urgent need to modernise and diversify the European higher education system if the universities are to compete in the global arena. Sustainable partnerships between universities and business and an interface between industry, business and primary and secondary education are thought to be the way forward. Currently, EU business and industry invest more in university R&D outside the EU than within it. Changes in how the academic world operates have already been introduced in some countries although such plans have been met with opposition in France.

Source

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/education/eu-universities-homogeneous-competitive/article-170496>

New Forum to Strengthen University – Business Cooperation

The European Commission has set up a European University/Business Forum in February 2008 in Brussels bringing together representatives of Higher Education Institutions, business, and national and EU-level public authorities. The forum aims to facilitate the exchange of good practice between universities and businesses, provide for mutual learning and networking, and inspire further action in the Member States. The Forum responds to calls from universities and companies for there to be a regular, sustained platform for dialogue, exchange, sharing and learning.

The main topics discussed were

- the modernisation of university governance structures with help from businesses expertise
- curricular development and its role in increasing employability and entrepreneurial mind-set among graduates
- lifelong education and retraining.
- development of mobility between academia and business

Source

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/343&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

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Two JTIs to boost Europe' s competitiveness

The European Commission has launched two new Joint Technology Initiatives (JTIs): ENIAC (nanoelectronics) and ARTEMIS (embedded systems). The public-private partnerships are designed to boost Europe's competitiveness in their respective fields by uniting industry, the research community and public authorities, promoting economies of scale and shortening the time to market for products based on these technologies. The budgets of the JTIs (€3 billion over 10 years for ENIAC and €2.5 billion for ARTEMIS) will come from the participating industry and research organisations, the European Commission and other public authorities.

Both JTIs will become fully operational as organisations based in Brussels with their own rules, staff, premises and budgets, and will be responsible for coordinating research through calls for proposals.

Sources

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<http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/eu-research-initiative-turn-micro-nanoelectronics/article-170514>

Joint Action to Battle Greenhouse Emissions

Competitiveness ministers of the 27 Member States gave the green light to the last Joint Technological Initiatives package measure on the development of Fuel Cell and Hydrogen technology aiming for its commercialisation between 2010 and 2020.

This industry-led initiative is an example of new energy technologies in the Strategic Energy Technology Plan and will receive €470 million of funding from the EU's research programme over the next six years, an amount to be matched by the private sector.

Sources

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Alliances for Exploring Toxicity

In February 2008 a remarkably new research collaboration was announced, bringing together the expertise in genomics, computing and cellular biology of two federal US agencies, the US Institute of Health (NIH) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This collaboration aims to revolutionise chemical toxicity testing, shifting it from animal screening to a cell-based, in-vitro system and to reduce the time between invention and marketing of a chemical and, most importantly, to reduce the cost of toxicology studies for the chemical industry.

If this research collaboration succeeds it may have a great impact on EU where the chemicals regulation REACH, in force since June 2007 was met with strong objections from the chemicals industry, due to the economic burden of the imposed safety testing.

Source

<http://www.genome.gov/Pages/Newsroom/CurrentNewsReleases/TranscriptFromToxTest.pdf>

Link

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/environment/revolutionary-technique-speed-chemical-testing/article-170461>

REACH Metals Gateway

The REACH Metals Gateway, an information system to guide the EU and International Metals Industry in the implementation process of the recently adopted EU REACH Regulation, has been launched. Tailored to the specific needs of the metals sector, it allows quick and structured access to relevant information from authorities and the metals industry itself. An overview is provided on responsibilities & contact points in metal commodity groups and national metal federations, where more detailed information can be found.

Link

<http://www.reach-metals.eu/>

Autonomy and Accountability of University Activities

Addressing the EUA Experts Conference in February, the Education Commissioner Ján Figel urged the need for autonomy of the universities if they are to attract funds and the need to define the full costs of their activities to justify public and private funding. The conference focused on the financial sustainability of Europe's higher education institutions and the links between costing and funding with autonomy, governance and accountability, and recommendations to universities for financial management towards full-cost accounting.

Unveiled at the conference were the first findings of an EUA study on the funding, which compares the income, expenditure flows, accounting systems, legal frameworks and progress towards full cost accounting of a group of European universities. The results so far show a huge diversity of institutional funding patterns and the development of full costing models, and a lack of common understanding of the financial terminology used and of coherence in defining the full costs of activities. The results of the EUA project will be published in the autumn of 2008.

Sources

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A new watchdog on teaching standards

The quality of teaching at European universities is periodically assessed by quality assurance agencies, whose quality will now be checked by the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR), officially launched in Brussels in early March 2008. The Register will be operational by summer 2008, and is governed and co-funded by a non-profit association of stakeholders, social partners and Bologna signatory countries.

The launching of the EQAR is in support of the Bologna Process whose aim is the creation of a single European Higher Education Area, by increased student and academic mobility and development of a simplified comparison system between qualifications across Europe. The EQAR will serve as an instrument to improve the quality of existing national quality assurance agencies and allow higher education institutions to choose between different agencies, if that is compatible with national arrangements.

The European Register will list the quality assurance agencies that substantially comply with a specific set of standards that have been approved at European level: the so-called **European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance**. These are valid in all the 46 countries that participate in the Bologna Process.

Source

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/370&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

EU and Methane to Markets Partnership

Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs, on a visit to Washington DC, has signed the terms of reference document formalising the participation of the European Commission in the Methane to Markets ("M2M") Partnership.

The Methane to Markets partnership is an initiative in reducing methane emissions to combat global warming and was launched in November 2004 in Washington, D.C. Currently the M2M Partnership consists of 20 national governments and the European Commission. The Commission will be active in the M2M steering committee as well as in the technical sub-committees "Methane from coal mines" and "Methane from oil and gas operations."

Source

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/376&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Nanotech faces moral opposition in the US

Europe's favourable public opinion on nanotechnology could help the EU to take the lead in this promising research field, as recent survey results suggest that a majority of Americans, based on religious beliefs, find it morally unacceptable.

In early February 2008, the Commission adopted a [code of conduct](#) for responsible research on nanosciences. The EU executive hopes that member states will use the document to promote societal dialogue on nanotech, for example, in order to increase understanding and involvement by the general public in the development of new technologies.

Source

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/science/nanotech-faces-moral-opposition-us/article-170423>

Beauty, Safety and the Nanoworld

The Commission's Scientific Committee on Consumer Products (SCCP) has recently concluded that current risk-assessment methods for nanomaterials in cosmetic products are not thorough enough, and recommended a case-by-case risk assessment of all nanoparticles used. The Committee calls for a review on the nanomaterials involved particularly in sunscreens, for the improvement of the existing methods and for the development of new ones.

The European Commission is currently completing a review of existing EU regulations to see whether specific nanotech legislation is needed to cover risks in relation to nanomaterials, or whether these materials can be considered as being part of, for example, the EU's chemicals legislation REACH. A Communication on the issue is foreseen in 2008.

Source

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