



Brussels News Update

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Blue card scheme backed by MEPs

MEPs on the Civil Liberties Committee backed the Blue Card scheme as a way to help address Europe's skills shortage which is estimated at 20 million people. MEPs in the Civil Liberties Committee want the card to be a work and residency permit for 3 years, which can also be renewed. Family members will also be allowed into the EU whilst individual countries would be able to decide for themselves how many skilled migrants to admit. For this directive the parliament is involved under the Consultation procedure. The parliament will later vote on the agreement reached in the committee.

Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/1>

Links: <http://www.euractiv.com/1> <http://www.earthtimes.org/1>

EERA is launched

Leading European energy research institutes have joined together to found the European Energy Research Alliance (EERA), with the aim of speeding up the development of the new energy technologies. Between them, the ten institutes have an annual budget for energy research and development (R&D) activities of over EUR 1,300 million. Through the EERA, the institutes will design and implement joint, pan-European research programmes and promote the sharing of world-class national research facilities. The first joint programmes are scheduled for launch in 2009. The creation of the EERA is one of a number of actions set out in the EU's Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET-Plan).

Sources: <http://europa.eu/rapid/1> <http://cordis.europa.eu/1>

Link: <http://www.euractiv.com/2>

MEPs advance climate vote

The Parliament has brought forward the date of a plenary vote on the EU's climate and energy proposals. On 3 and 4 December 2008, the full Parliament will vote on a package of four proposals, tabled by the Commission on 23 January this year to reduce the EU's CO₂ emissions by 2020 while boosting the share of renewable energies to 20% over the same period. Originally scheduled for the plenary during the third week (15-18) of December, an earlier vote means that EU heads of state and government will need to take the views of the bloc's co-legislators into account when they convene for the next European summit on 11 and 12 December in Brussels. The French EU Presidency remains committed to reaching a deal before the end of 2008.

Source: <http://www.euractiv.com/3> **Link:** <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/1>

New international agency to promote renewable energies

Joint efforts to expand worldwide use of renewable energies have received a boost as 51 countries from all continents are preparing to launch IRENA (International Renewable Energy Agency) in January. It will work closely with other related international organisations and initiatives, only offering its services at the request of member states. Details of the agency's size remain unclear, but a "lean" structure is foreseen. Signatory countries are invited to submit applications for the location of its headquarters as well as nominations for a director-general. The agency's mandate encompasses all forms of renewable energy, including bio-energy, solar power and wind energy.

Source: <http://www.euractiv.com/4>

Safety first for pesticides

The Environment Committee has voted on new legislation governing the production, licensing and use of pesticides, with the overall aim is to encourage the use of the less toxic substances or of non-chemical alternatives. MEPs confirmed that certain toxic chemicals will be banned, except where there is a serious danger to plant health. They also argued that the EU should not be divided into three pesticide licensing zones. In addition, Member States will have to meet quantitative targets for reducing the volume of pesticides used.

Negotiations will take place with Council on a number of points before the plenary vote in Parliament in December or January. Chemicals will be approved at EU level for differing

periods of time, depending on their toxicity. Products containing certain hazardous substances ("candidates for substitution") are to be replaced if safer alternatives are shown to exist. MEPs voted to speed up this process, cutting the maximum replacement deadline from five years to two.

Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/2> **Link:** <http://www.euractiv.com/5>

Nanotechnologies and food and feed safety

EFSA has launched a public consultation on its draft scientific opinion in relation to nanoscience and nanotechnologies and food and feed safety. This draft opinion focuses on engineered nano materials (ENM) that could be deliberately introduced into the food chain. It elaborates on approaches to risk assessment in this field and as such is not an assessment of any specific application of ENM. The European Commission (EC) has asked for this opinion as a first step because consideration needs to be given as to whether existing risk assessment approaches can be appropriately applied to this new technology. When finalised, EFSA's opinion will then help the EC to explore appropriate measures, assess existing legislation and determine the scope of possible further requests for scientific opinions from EFSA in this field.

Recommendations are made in the draft opinion for further data, research and investigations to address uncertainties and limitations and therefore strengthen the understanding, evidence base and methodologies to be applied in assessing the risk of ENMs. The opinion also gives an indication to potential applicants of the data they would need to provide to allow for a risk assessment. EFSA will also meet with stakeholders to discuss the draft opinion and engage with EU Member States (MS) through its Advisory Forum. The final opinion will be adopted, considering the comments received, after the public consultation. Comments on the draft opinion can be submitted until 1st December 2008, via the EFSA website.

Sources: <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/1> <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/2>
Link: <http://www.euractiv.com/6>

JRC and EFSA alliance

A new Co-operation Agreement signed in Brussels between the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) will advance scientific co-operation in areas such as GMOs, BSE, the effects of climate change on food safety and feed additives, and the development of international standards in the fields of food and feed safety. The detailed Memorandum of Understanding signed by both organisations sets out how the JRC and EFSA will aim to ensure that additional robust data is provided for risk assessment, that harmonised standards are applied to data generation and that analytical best practices are shared.

The Agreement will also contribute to the better understanding of the relationship between food and health in areas such as food allergens, acrylamide and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Staff development and training programmes will be enhanced while exchanges of scientists will increase. The thematic areas given the greatest prominence under the new framework are Food and Feed Safety, with an extension to Animal Health and Welfare, Impact of Climate Change on Plant Health, and Nutrition.

Source: <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/3>

Clusters and Europe's competitiveness

A communication published recently by the European Commission calls for more efforts for facilitating the emergence of world-class clusters in the European Union and proposes a number of measures to improve synergies between the different policy levels that affect further strengthening of clusters. The communication addresses key challenges to achieve this: deepening the internal market, improving cluster policies, fostering trans-national cooperation, promoting excellence of cluster organisations, and improving the integration of innovative SMEs into clusters.

A European Cluster Policy Group would be established to share intelligence about cluster policies and advise on how to support the emergence and growth of world-class excellence clusters in Europe. This Policy Group will replace the current High Level Advisory Group on clusters.

Source: <http://europa.eu/rapid/2> **Link:** <http://www.euractiv.com/7>

Major boost to Erasmus Mundus

MEPs gave the green light to a second funding period for the EU's Erasmus Mundus Programme, which aims to promote the EU as a centre of academic excellence. In backing the estimated budget of €950million for the 2009-2013 period of the new programme, Parliament adopted changes to some of the criteria for obtaining funding, with a view to simplifying visa applications for participants from non-EU countries and ensuring a balance in terms of students' gender and country of origin. The new Programme should be able to begin as planned at the start of 2009. For the first time in the new funding stream from 2009, European students will also be able to apply for scholarships to participate in Erasmus Mundus Masters programmes, though the majority of scholarships will still go to students and academics from countries outside the EU. **Source:** <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/3> **Link:** <http://www.euractiv.com/8>

Eco-design Directive: product priorities

The European Commission has unveiled a list of ten priority energy-using product groups for which it wants energy-efficiency standards to be established in the next three years. The product groups under investigation will be included in the EU's 2005 Eco-design Directive, which defines binding minimum standards for energy performance.

The candidates for the list were chosen on the basis of their primary energy consumption in order to select the products that would make the most significant contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The aim is to eventually include all energy-related products, including such non-energy using products as clothing and insulation materials.

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/1> **Link:** <http://www.euractiv.com/9>

The Fuel Cell and Hydrogen JTI launched

Representatives of industry, the research community and the European institutions launched officially the Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Joint Technology Initiative (JTI) at the First Stakeholders General Assembly in Brussels. The Commission will fund 470 M€ from the FP7 programme over six years and at least the same amount will come from private industry with the aim of accelerating the development of hydrogen and fuel cell

technologies and bringing them to the market by 2020. It is estimated that the JTI's activities will reduce the time to market for these technologies by two to five years. The new JTI brings together over 60 private companies, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large multinationals, together with leading energy research groups from across Europe. Its work will be overseen by a Governing Board comprising representatives from research, industry and the Commission. An Executive Director and the Programme Office will manage the day-to-day running of the organisation. Further input will come from three advisory boards. The JTI will focus its efforts on four main areas: transportation and hydrogen refueling infrastructure; hydrogen production and distribution; stationary power generation and combined heat and power (CHP); and early markets (fuel cell products that are almost ready for commercialisation). The JTI's first call for proposals, which has a budget of EUR 28.1 million, has already been launched.

Sources: <http://europa.eu/rapid/3> <http://cordis.europa.eu/2>

Link: <http://www.euractiv.com/10>

Call for proposals: Fuel Cells and Hydrogen Joint Undertaking

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/3>

EU business R&D spending still on the increase

European companies are increasing their research and development (R&D) investments faster than their counterparts in the US and Japan, according to the EU's latest 'Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard'. Released annually, the scoreboard draws on R&D investment data from the 1,000 EU companies that invest the most in R&D and the 1,000 leading R&D spenders from outside the EU. The pharmaceuticals and biotechnology sector is still the top R&D investor worldwide, accounting for 19% of all R&D investments by the companies on the scoreboard. Another strong performer was the energy sector, where some leading players have dramatically increased their R&D spending over recent years. Within this sector, companies working on alternative energies such as wind and solar power show the strongest growth rates.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/4>

Safety implication of biofuels in aviation

The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has launched a call for tenders to study safety implications of biofuels in aviation. The study is intended to provide better understanding of the behaviour of ethanol-blended fuels in an aviation environment. The investigation shall focus on the safety implications on aircraft/engine operation and on tanks, fuel pipes, seals and fuels systems of spark-ignited, piston engine-powered aircraft and engines when operated with fuel containing bioethanol.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/5>

Deal on the promotion of clean road transport

Parliament adopted a first-reading agreement with Council on the promotion of clean and energy-efficient road transport by obliging public authorities and certain operators to consider not only the cost, but the lifetime energy and environmental impacts (including energy consumption, CO₂ emissions and emissions of certain pollutants (including NO_x,

NMHC and particulate matter)), of the vehicles that they plan to purchase. The aim of the directive is to promote and stipulate the market for clean and efficient vehicles to prompt industry to develop and invest in environmentally friendly vehicles. The directive stays mandatory, but Member States are given some flexibility.

Sources: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/3> <http://europa.eu/rapid/4>

Link: <http://www.euractiv.com/11>

Broadening participation in higher education

The European University Association (EUA) has officially presented the new *European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning*. The Charter is based around a series of 10 commitments made by universities in addressing the development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies, with a set of matching commitments proposed for governments and regional partners.

The purpose of this Charter is to assist Europe's universities in developing their specific role as lifelong learning institutions forming a central pillar of the Europe of Knowledge. The Charter will be discussed during an informal meeting of EU education ministers late November.

Source: <http://www.eua.be/eua-news2> **Link:** <http://www.euractiv.com/12>

Science for the benefit of all

The social responsibilities of the global scientific community and the values that should guide the conduct of scientists are at the core of a new booklet released by the International Council for Science (ICSU). The new booklet, entitled *Freedom, Responsibility and the Universality of Science*, explains the 'Principle of Universality of Science', which is based on non-discrimination and equity and outlines the duty and responsibilities of scientists. **Source:** <http://cordis.europa.eu/6>

Pharmacogenics

The European Science Foundation (ESF) has called on leading scientists to join the pharmacogenics trend. **Source:** <http://cordis.europa.eu/7>

New strategy to address raw material needs

The European Commission has launched a new integrated strategy, which sets out targeted measures to secure and improve the access to raw materials for EU industry. The Commission recommends that the EU will define critical raw materials.

Source: <http://europa.eu/rapid/5> **Link:** <http://www.euractiv.com/13>

Baltic Sea Region Strategy: online public consultation

Member States, regional and local authorities, NGOs, inter-governmental bodies and the general public are invited to put forward their views on the strategy for the Baltic Sea Region between now and 31 December 2008. The main aims of the strategy are to improve the environmental state of the Baltic Sea, to support balanced economic development in the region, and to make it more accessible and secure.

Source: <http://europa.eu/rapid/6> **Link:** <http://www.euractiv.com/14>

Waste-to-Energy: A new framework for waste management in the EU

The Council has adopted a directive setting a revised framework for waste management in the EU, aimed at encouraging re-use and recycling of waste as well as at simplifying current legislation. The directive introduces a new approach to waste management that encourages the prevention of waste. The directive lays down a five-step hierarchy of waste management options, which must be applied by Member States when developing their national waste policies:

- waste prevention (preferred option);
- re-use;
- recycling;
- recovery (including energy recovery); and
- safe disposal, as a last resort.

Member States are required to transpose the directive into national law within two years.

Source: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/2> **Link:** <http://www.euractiv.com/15>

OECD report urges countries to promote science and innovation

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has published *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Outlook 2008*, a review that advises governments to promote science and innovation in order to drive long-term growth. The publication encourages OECD member countries to foster links between public research bodies and industry, and to increase international cooperation.

According to the OECD's report, business accounts for the majority of research and development (R&D) performed in most OECD countries while merging economies account for a sharply growing share of global spending on research and development (R&D). The European Commission participates in the work of the organisation and has a quasi-member status. **Source:** <http://cordis.europa.eu/8>

Monitoring policy and research activities on 'Science in society' in Europe

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Research has published a call for tenders to monitor policy and research activities on 'Science in society' in Europe.

The MASIS ('Monitoring research and policy activities of science in society') service contract will set up, in cooperation with EU Member States and associated countries, a system to map and follow the developments of the most important 'Science in society' activities at national and European levels with the aim to inform relevant policy makers and all other stakeholders; increase the visibility of such activities in different parts of Europe; and increase their impact on European policy and society.

MASIS will build upon existing national, regional and European resources where these exist, providing them with visibility and enhancing their European dimension. Where such resources do not exist, MASIS will launch information gathering measures with the help of a network of national correspondents. The contract will include a set of national reports, a synthesis report on 'Science in society' activities in the European Research

Area, and the maintenance of an online system to be linked to the EU 'Science in society' portal. **Source:** <http://cordis.europa.eu/9>

COST call for proposals for cooperation in the field of research

COST (European Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research) has launched a call for proposals on actions contributing to the scientific, technological, economic, cultural or societal development in Europe. Proposals playing a precursor role for other European programmes and/or initiated by early-stage researchers are especially welcome. Applicants are invited to locate their topic within one of the nine broad COST domains. However, inter-disciplinary proposals not fitting readily into a single domain are particularly welcome and will be assessed separately.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/10>

Two calls for proposals launched

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Research has published two calls for proposals in the Thematic Area of *Research potential of convergence regions* under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). The first call, entitled *Unlocking and developing the research potential of research entities in the EU's convergence regions and outermost regions*, is designed for single public or private research entities of significant size, such as university departments, faculties or specialised research institutes, which have been established in the EU's convergence regions and outermost regions. The indicative budget for this call amounts to EUR 30 million.

With an indicative budget of EUR 8 million, the second call for proposals on *International co-operation* is intended for groups where at least one research entity is from a Mediterranean Partner Country, one from a convergence region or outermost region in a Member State or Associated Country, and one from another Member State or Associated Country. **Source:** <http://cordis.europa.eu/11>

Does Framework Work?

This autumn the European Commission has begun a full review of its flagship R&D funding effort, Framework Programme 7. The review will assess accomplishments and problems to date in FP7 and set the stage for mid-course adjustments in spending priorities and rules in 2009-10. The outcome will be a special report by Science|Business that will set the stage for a set of specific policy recommendations for publication later in 2008. **Source:** <http://www.sciencebusiness.net2>



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