



Brussels News Update

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- MEPs vote on Strategic Energy Technology Plan
- G8 ministers pledge to boost low carbon research funding
- Agriculture Ministers adopt Plant Protection Product Regulation
- Commission launches public dialogue on nanotechnologies
- Modernising the rules on food additives and labelling of azo dyes
- EURAXESS
- ERA-Link with Japan launched
- Law and nanomaterials
- French presidency and its priorities
- Single access point to research careers in Europe launched
- ERC receives over 2,000 applications for Advanced Grants
- ESF and EUROHORCs: joint vision for European Research Area
- Revision of waste directive
- Tougher water quality standards
- Budapest wins race for EIT seat
- New Research Infrastructures portal launched
- Cooperation, Schools and the 21st Century
- Universities for children and Europe

MEPs vote on Strategic Energy Technology Plan

MEPs have adopted a new report which outlines recommendations on how the EU can strengthen the European Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan and help the EU to meet its climate change targets. The report aims to achieve this ambitious goal by setting out a plan on what the energy agenda for Europe should be. The agenda includes promoting research into new, clean energy technologies which the parliament views as crucial to successfully fighting climate change.

Taking centre stage in the report is a commitment to promote energy efficiency. According to the report, this is where the greatest potential for CO₂ reductions are to be found. Specifically, the report describes it as 'the area with the most potential for cost effective emission reductions in the medium term'. Biofuels, which have been under increasing scrutiny recently, are also mentioned in the report, which calls for increased research in this area. This research would determine once and for all the overall environmental impact of the production of those fuels.

Another example of the EU's commitment to new technologies is the recommendation to support the creation of up to 12 proposed Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) demonstration projects.

Parliament however made it clear that the SET Plan should not be financed through the reallocation of funds made available for energy under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) and the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP). Instead they stressed to the Commission that alternative funding be allocated for the support of new low carbon and zero carbon technology research and development, demonstration and commercialisation activities.

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

G8 ministers pledge to boost low carbon research funding

Participants at the Group of Eight (G8) Science and Technology Ministers' Meeting in Japan have pledged to boost funding for research which will lead to the realisation of a low carbon economy. The discussion focused on three areas: how to achieve a low carbon society through international research cooperation; science and technology cooperation with developing countries; and cooperation in research and development resources.

On the first point, the ministers highlighted the important role that research, technology and innovation have to play in addressing climate and energy security challenges. Furthermore, they recognised that simply making existing technologies more efficient will not be enough, but that 'fundamental breakthroughs in science and technology' will be needed.

The ministers noted that international cooperation should be encouraged across a wide range of energy technologies, including fusion energy (which is the subject of the ITER project), carbon capture and storage and the development of new technologies which can produce biofuels from non-food plant materials. On research cooperation with developing countries, the participants reached a consensus that 'the advancement of science and technology in developing countries is essential for their sustainable development'.

The ministers recognise that education and capacity building are key to helping developing countries solve the challenges facing them. They suggest that one way to support capacity building would be to enable developing country researchers to work more closely with G8 research and training institutions. Nevertheless, to avoid brain drain, mechanisms need to be set up to encourage the scientists to return to their home countries. Finally, the ministers discussed cooperation in the use of research resources. The ministers emphasise the importance of avoiding duplications in the construction of large-scale research facilities. With this in mind, they agreed to 'exchange information, such as accessibility, on existing large-scale research facilities and basic information, such as the scale, priority and schedule for future facilities in each country'.

Participants at the meeting also discussed the importance of researcher mobility, with a particular focus on the concept of 'brain circulation', in which G8 countries both accept researchers from and send them to developing countries.

The outcomes of the Okinawa meeting will be fed into the main G8 Summit in July. Meanwhile the forthcoming Italian Presidency of the G8 has announced that it plans to hold a second G8 Science and Technology Ministers' Meeting in 2009.

Sources: <http://cordis.europa.eu1> <http://www8.cao1>

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

Agriculture Ministers adopt Plant Protection Product Regulation

The EU's Agriculture Ministers adopted the Regulation on placing plant protection products on the market and pointed out that, in defining criteria for the approval of active substances, consideration had been given to the influence of plant protection products on the long-term food supply in the European Union.

The new arrangements totally prohibit the marketing and use of substances proven to be carcinogenic, mutagenic and toxic for reproduction. In exceptional cases, when available products do not offer sufficiently effective plant protection, other hazardous substances may be used, but only under strictly regulated conditions. The new Regulation encourages replacing hazardous plant protection products with safer products. In addition, it will no longer be possible to grant provisional authorisation to products still in the process of registration unless the EU-level assessment lasts longer than two and a half years.

Regardless of the implementation of the system of mutual recognition of registered preparations in three EU zones, the Member States will be able to reject the mutual recognition of registration of certain products or restrict their application in the event of specific national environmental protection or agro-technological circumstances. Under the new arrangements, professional consumers and producers of plant protection products will have to keep records of the use of these products, an area not previously uniformly regulated at EU level.

The Regulation simplifies the rules for the protection of intellectual property data and restricts the duplication of tests on vertebrates.

Source: <http://www.eu2008.si/en/News>

Link: <http://www.euractiv1.com>

Commission launches public dialogue on nanotechnologies

The European Commission is planning a wide ranging consultation on nanotechnologies with the aim of raising awareness of nanotechnologies' potential. At the same time, the consultation is designed to address citizens' concerns about their possible impact on health and the environment.

Currently, nanotechnologies are covered by legislation in many fields, including chemicals, food, cosmetics and medicine. Nevertheless, more information on nanomaterials and safety is still needed, and with this in mind the Commission is promoting nanotechnology research both within its research framework programmes and through international fora such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu2>

Modernising the rules on food additives and labelling of azo dyes

MEPs updated and simplified EU rules for authorising food additives, flavourings and enzymes with the European Parliament adopting a legislative package on four draft regulations. The new procedures will assist the free movement of food within the EU and will also give better health and consumer protection, including clearer labelling of certain food colourings. In parallel to the authorisation procedure for new additives, flavourings and enzymes, all such substances already on the market - around 300 additives and 2,600 flavourings - will gradually be re-assessed. Additives/flavourings/enzymes that are currently

authorised may stay on the market but once the updating process is complete, any such substance not on the approved list will be banned.

Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu3>

Link: <http://www.euractiv2.com>

EURAXESS

The European Commission is making it easier than ever before for researchers to increase their employment opportunities and network with other researchers and organisations with the launch of the EURAXESS web portal. EURAXESS provides a single access point to information and support services. This portal assists researchers and their families in moving to and pursuing careers in another Member State.

The EURAXESS web portal offers four initiatives focussing on jobs, services, rights and links. EURAXESS Jobs takes over from the former European Researcher's Mobility Portal, and operates as a recruitment tool which will be constantly updated with job vacancies for researchers throughout Europe.

EURAXESS Services, formerly the ERA-MORE Network, helps researchers and their families to organise their stay in a foreign country. EURAXESS Rights sets out the rights and duties of researchers and their employers; this is based on the European Charter and Code. Finally, the EURAXESS Links service, formerly ERA-Link, is a networking tool for European researchers working outside Europe.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu4>

ERA-Link with Japan launched

The European Commission has officially launched the network of European researchers in Japan. Through the network, the Commission helps researchers develop their contacts and provides access to information on career development, research funding and Europe-Japan cooperation opportunities. Under the name EURAXESS-Links, the network will be charged with establishing a number of services:

- a website containing information on research funding, career and work opportunities at Member State and EU level, as well as interactive tools for information exchange;
- e-mail alerts to make users aware of new opportunities;
- an e-mail newsletter;
- information on networking, meetings and events;
- participation in and organisation of career fairs and workshops for researchers to establish ties with industry, research institutions and other potential employers.

Generally speaking, with the help of such networks, the Commission hopes to promote Europe as an open, competitive and attractive labour market for researchers, transforming the concepts of 'brain drain' and 'brain gain' into 'brain circulation' instead. The new EURAXESS-Links is the second network of its kind, after the ERA-Link with the USA was launched in June 2006, and since then 3,500 US-based European researchers have joined. Further ERA-Link networks are in the pipeline, including one for researchers based in China.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu5>

Law and nanomaterials

The EU executive's regulatory review of existing European legislation has concluded that "current legislation may have to be modified in the light of new information becoming available, for example as regards thresholds used in some legislation". The communication covers nanomaterials currently in production and/or placed on the market, but does not address nanomaterials or nanoparticles that occur naturally or are unintentionally produced through, for example, combustion. Specific labelling schemes for products containing nanomaterials could notably be developed.

Source: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu6>

Link: <http://www.euractiv3.com>

French presidency and its priorities

The French have set the construction of the European Research Area (ERA) as the main research priority for their presidency of the EU. Other priorities include boosting Europe's role in space and making progress towards a Community patent.

The French took over the EU Council Presidency from Slovenia on 1 July. During their time at the helm, they plan to focus on four main areas: energy and the climate; migration issues; agriculture; and security and defence.

In the field of research, the French plan to carry forward the Ljubljana process which was launched under the Slovenian Presidency and sets out a new vision for the ERA.

According to the work programme of the French Presidency, a range of activities designed to define a 'vision for 2020' for the ERA will be launched. Among other things, research ministers will discuss the challenges facing European research, with the aim of setting out how the ERA can address priority issues such as energy and climate change, food and agronomy, health and ageing, and the information society.

The French have also set themselves the goal of reaching conclusions on a number of points, namely the joint programme strategy, the mobility of researchers and a strategy for international cooperation in the ERA. They also hope to reach an agreement on the legal framework for pan-European research infrastructures. Many of these issues will be discussed at an informal meeting of Europe's research ministers which will be held in Versailles, France, on 16 and 17 July.

Sources: <http://cordis.europa.eu7> <http://cordis.europa.eu8>

Single access point to research careers in Europe launched

The Commission has launched a new web portal regrouping existing information and services aimed at boosting mobility of European researchers and improving their career opportunities. The new web portal aims to facilitate researchers' access to information on their mobility options and help them pursue a career in Europe. It provides a single access point for job offers, assistance for professional stays in a foreign country, information on the rights and duties of researchers and their employers as well as access to a network of European researchers working outside Europe.

It thus regroups four existing EU initiatives to promote researchers' mobility and career development: the European Researchers' Mobility Portal, the ERA-MORE Network, the

European Charter & Code for researchers and their recruitment and the ERA-Link.

Source: <http://www.euractiv4.com>

ERC receives over 2,000 applications for Advanced Grants

The European Research Council (ERC) has received 2,167 applications for its Advanced Grants. These included 766 proposals in the area of life sciences and medicine, 997 in physical sciences and engineering, and 404 proposals for social sciences and humanities research. Successful applicants will be eligible to receive a grant totalling €3.5 million. The budget allocated for this call amounts to €517 million. Currently, all proposals have gone through the first stage of peer review. The next stage involves further evaluation through the months of June to September.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu9>

ESF and EUROHORCs: joint vision for European Research Area

The European Heads of Research Councils (EUROHORCs) and the European Science Foundation (ESF) lay out the needs and requirements that have to be reached if the EU is to create an ERA which is truly competitive on a global scale within the next 5 to 10 years. This vision is complemented by a road map of actions which need to be undertaken by EUROHORCs and ESF member organisations, as well as other partners. The two parties also came forward with a number of suggestions for the EU, including the notion that the EU should inject more resources into basic research through programmes such as the European Research Council (ERC), that efforts should be undertaken to reduce the EU's bureaucracy, and that the EU should put pressure on its Member States to remove the barriers to the mobility of researchers. The statement also sets out a 10-point vision list. Items on this list include effective European research policy, which will capitalise on cultural, geographic and scientific diversity and creating a single labour market for researchers.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu10>

Revision of waste directive

The European Commission welcomes the European Parliament's second reading vote approving the agreement reached with the Council on the revision of the waste framework directive, the central pillar of EU waste management policy. The revised directive takes into account many of the changes proposed by the European Parliament. In summary, the directive sets new recycling targets to be achieved by the Member States by 2020, strengthens provisions on waste prevention, sets a clear, five-step "hierarchy" of waste management options and clarifies a number of important definitions, such as recycling, recovery and waste itself. The new directive will also streamline EU waste legislation by replacing three existing directives: the existing Waste Framework Directive, the Hazardous Waste Directive and the Waste Oils Directive.

Sources: <http://europa.eu11> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu4>

Link: <http://www.euractiv5.com>

Tougher water quality standards

Regarding the Water Framework Directive 33 pollutants, mainly pesticides and heavy metals, likely to be found in rivers, lakes and coastal waters, will be subject to environmental quality standards (EQS). Member States will have to "make progress towards compliance" of these standards by 2018, according to a second-reading agreement with Council. The proposed

directive on water quality is the final piece of legislation needed to support the Water Framework Directive. Amongst the main points of the agreement with Council are an increase in the number of substances to be controlled by 2018 and a reduction of the extent of mixing zones in the future.

The directive will be adopted in 2008 and will enter into practice in 2010 at the earliest (18 months of transposition).

Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu5>

Budapest wins race for EIT seat

The headquarters of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) will be hosted by Budapest.

Sources: <http://cordis.europa.eu12> <http://www.eu2008.si2>

Link: <http://www.euractiv6.com>

New Research Infrastructures portal launched

Research Infrastructures (RIs) are playing an ever increasing role in advancing knowledge and technology throughout Europe. More, however, could be done to increase their profile, which is precisely what the creation of the European Research Infrastructure Web Portal is intended to do.

Not only will it increase awareness of RIs but it will also provide a complete picture of the RI landscape in Europe. Policy makers, researchers and scientists will now be able to access information through the web portal on a great number of major European facilities, by discipline, by country and/or by type of infrastructure.

Research Infrastructures are facilities, resources and related services that are used by the scientific community to conduct top-level research in their respective fields. These can range from social sciences to astronomy, genomics to nanotechnologies.

Some high profile RIs include the world's largest particle physics laboratory at CERN, the European Molecular Biology Laboratory and the European Southern Observatory. Other RIs include lesser known singular large-scale research installations, special habitats, libraries, databases, biological archives, integrated arrays of small research installations, research vessels, and satellite and aircraft observation facilities to name but a few. The web portal also includes listings of RI networks, which are sorted by scientific domain. These networks include Nuclear and particle physics, astronomy, astrophysics (NPPAA); Environment, marine and earth sciences (EMES); Humanities; Engineering; Social sciences; Computer and data treatment; Material sciences; Biomedical and life sciences (BMLS) and e-Infrastructure projects.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu13>

Cooperation, Schools and the 21st Century

After repeated calls to modernise higher education, the European Commission wants Member States to cooperate better in order to make school systems more relevant to pupils' and employers' needs in the knowledge-based Europe of the future. The Commission Communication "Improving Competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools", presented recently says that change, sometimes

radical, will be needed if Europe's schools are to equip young people fully for life in this century. The Commission proposes an agenda for cooperation in three areas:

- A focus on giving all pupils the competences they need for life.
- A commitment to provide high quality learning for every student.
- Improving the quality of teachers and school staff.

Sources: <http://europa.eu13> <http://ec.europa.eu1> <http://ec.europa.eu2>
Link: <http://www.euractiv7.com>

Universities for children and Europe

The European Commission is set to sign a grant agreement that will kick start the formation of a European network of children's universities called EUCUNET - the European Children's University Network. Aimed at young girls and boys, this concept gets young children interested in science and research at the earliest age possible. Funding totalling €550,000 over the next two years will be provided by the Science in Society theme of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). The objective of EUCUNET is to create a database of activities which are currently or have already been undertaken in Europe in the area of children's universities. The heart of this network will be formed by the already established children's universities located in Basel, Bratislava, Strasbourg, Tübingen and Vienna. Also as part of the service offered by EUCUNET, will be mentoring partnerships which will allow for targeted cooperation between established organisers and those who are raring to start activities. Furthermore, standards and guidelines for planning and organising such science events as well as the basics for sustainable impact analysis procedures, will be developed.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu13>



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