



Brussels News Update

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New partnership for researchers

Pan-European pension schemes, greater job flexibility and more skills training are just some of the benefits promised to European researchers in a new partnership between the European Commission and Member States. The European Partnership for Researchers was unveiled in Brussels at the end of May and builds on several existing initiatives. The most notable are the 2005 European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers, and the 'scientific visa' package for the fast track admission and residence of non-European researchers.

The partnership replaces the European researchers' passport. By 2010, the Commission and Member States aim to jointly make 'measurable progress' in four key areas, namely recruitment, social security and pensions, working conditions, and training. At the end of the first stage of the partnership in 2010, an overall evaluation of the situation and results from actions by the partnership will be made and the need for further EU action to address specific outstanding issues will be considered.

The European Partnership for Researchers is one of five actions planned by the Commission with a view to making the European Research Area a reality. The remaining initiatives are the management of intellectual property by public research organisations; a legal framework for pan-European research infrastructures; joint programming and programmes; and international science and technology cooperation.

Source: <http://cordis.europa1.eu>

EFSA invites leading scientists to sign up to its new expert database

The European Food Safety Authority, the European Union's scientific risk assessment body on food and feed safety, nutrition, animal welfare and plant protection and health, is launching a database for Europe's leading scientific experts to assist it in its work. The database will be used to assist its Scientific Committee and Panels in their risk assessment activities. The expert database will also be available to all EU Member States who may use it to select experts for their own scientific activities.

EFSA will be organising a series of activities over the coming months to promote the engagement and participation of scientists in EFSA's growing risk assessment activities. An important component of this will be a series of seminars, mainly in the newer EU Member States. The call for EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panel members will be launched in Autumn this year.

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

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

Progress for research

The Competitiveness Council has given the go ahead for the new Joint Technology Initiative on Fuel Cells and Hydrogen (FCH JTI) as well as the launch of the Ljubljana Process. The FCH JTI had already been given the go ahead by the European Parliament and it is now scheduled to be officially launched in October after the Member States have adopted the necessary regulation.

The European research and economy ministers also adopted a recommendation on the management and transfer of intellectual property (IP). The so-called Intellectual Property Charter (IP-Charter) calls upon public research institutes and universities to develop internal strategies for protecting and dealing with intellectual property. This is intended as a measure against unchecked knowledge drain and counterfeiting. At the same time the charter sets out standards for the exploitation of publicly funded research that aims to give a new quality international collaboration in this field.

In addition, this latest Competitiveness Council stressed the importance of European research infrastructures and their regional dimension. 'Excellent research infrastructures play a key role in the development of the European Research Area (ERA) by promoting excellence in science, enabling globally competitive basic and applied research,' the Council concluded, calling on the Commission to further facilitate the cooperation and combination of national, regional and local sources of funding.

Source: <http://cordis.europa2.eu>

REACH pre-registration phase begins

Following its official launch on 1 June, the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) has started to accept pre-registrations of chemicals under the REACH (Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals) legislation. The legislation, which covers some 30,000 chemicals, no longer differentiates between existing and new chemicals, obliging all chemicals on the market to undergo rigorous testing. Between now and 1 December 2008, companies that make or import more than one tonne of chemical substances per year will be encouraged to pre-register these chemicals online via the REACH-IT portal. The agency is expected to handle a staggering 200,000 pre-registrations overall.

The pre-registration phase is meant to help companies identify and get in touch with other companies that are planning to register the same substance, giving them to sufficient time to

set up a Substance Information Exchange Forum (SIEF). In a SIEF, companies are obliged to share animal testing studies to reduce to an absolute minimum the number of animals used for testing. Following the pre-registration phase, companies will have until 1 December 2010 for the final registration and market authorisation of all substances produced or imported in quantities equal to or greater than 1,000 tonnes a year. Meanwhile, companies that import or produce smaller amounts of chemicals - approximately one tonne or more a year - will have until June 2018 to register these substances.

Source: <http://cordis.europa3.eu>

EU contributes EUR 40 million to fight against infectious diseases

The European Commission has promised EUR 40 million in funding to the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP). The amount signifies half of the EUR 80 million that the EDCTP has approved for research into the prevention of poverty-related diseases in Africa. This latest funding announcement from the EDCTP represents the highest amount of funding approved to date by the body. The EU's contribution will be matched by the EU Member States and third parties involved in the initiative. The money will go towards research into tuberculosis vaccines, malaria treatments, malaria vaccines and studies on malaria in pregnancy. Further funding for HIV vaccines, treatments and microbicides and TB treatment is expected to be made available later this year.

The trials initiated by the EDCTP involving TB and malaria will also be combined with capacity building and networking activities. These will ensure the long term sustainability of clinical trials in the region. A number of projects will focus on creating and developing capacity for ethics reviews of clinical trials and on enhancing the regulatory framework needed for approval of medicines in Africa. This enables African countries to conduct high-quality and ethically sound clinical trials, and to assess the safety and efficacy of all medicines that enter the African market.

The EDCTP is a partnership of 14 European Member States plus Norway, Switzerland and sub-Saharan countries. Its aim is to reduce the global burden of HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria by pooling resources for conducting clinical trials in sub-Saharan Africa. This will be achieved through combining research to speed up the development of new or improved drugs, vaccines, diagnostics and microbicides against HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, through trials in sub-Saharan Africa.

Source: <http://cordis.europa4.eu>

Third European Grid Initiative in Switzerland

The third European Grid Initiative (EGI) workshop will take place in Geneva, Switzerland, on 30 June. The event will concentrate on defining the structure of the EGI organisation. A draft of the EGI Blueprint will be presented and discussed.

The EU-funded European Grid Initiative Design Study (EGI_DS) represents an effort to establish a sustainable grid infrastructure in Europe. Driven by the needs and requirements of the research community, it is expected to enable the next leap in research infrastructures, thereby supporting collaborative scientific discoveries in the European Research Area (ERA).

The main foundations of EGI are the National Grid Initiatives (NGI), which operate the grid infrastructures in each country. EGI will link existing NGIs and will actively support the setup and initiation of new NGIs.

Source: <http://cordis.europa5.eu/>

Future priorities for improving the quality of doctoral education in Europe

More than 270 EUA (European University Association) members and partners gathered in Lausanne to agree on an agenda for improving the quality of doctoral programmes in Europe's universities. Rectors, heads of graduate, doctoral and research schools, networks involved in doctoral training, and policy makers took part in the inaugural meeting of the EUA Council for Doctoral Education, a new structure created by the European University Association and dedicated to advancing doctoral education and research training in Europe. The following five themes emerged at the top of the list for European universities:

- Improving the supervision of PhD candidates, particularly through better training and monitoring of supervisors themselves;
- Enhancing institutional cooperation, notably through the development of joint doctoral programmes and double degrees;
- Introducing new structures (such as doctoral schools) within institutions to manage doctoral education;
- Better provision of skills training for doctoral candidates (particularly 'transferable' skills);
- Enhancing quality control and evaluation of PhD programmes;
- EUA-CDE also announced that it will be organising a workshop focusing on 'Enhancing Supervision: Professional Development and Assessment of Supervisors' that will take place at Imperial College London, UK in January 2009.

Source: <http://cordis.europa6.eu>

Link: <http://www.eua.be/cde>

South African scientists access European research via EMBO agreement

South African scientists will gain access to the latest thinking in molecular biology research through an agreement announced today by the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO).

The Government of the Republic of South Africa signed a cooperation agreement with the European Molecular Biology Conference (EMBC), the intergovernmental funding body for EMBO, allowing scientists from South Africa to participate in EMBO programmes and activities. The agreement also provides for some EMBO activities to occur in South Africa.

Source: <http://cordis.europa6.eu>

European Patent System and Red Tape

The EU Competitiveness Council discussed improving the patent system in Europe. The specialist discussion was extended to include preparations for and deliberations on the key legal acts needed to set up an EU Patent Court and the Community Patent. While there was broad consensus on a general framework for a solution, a series of aspects of the system still require further discussion. The Ministers agreed that efforts to find definitive solutions for both the judicial system on patents and the Community patent should be pursued.

Litigation issues associated with translation is a key point connected to the European Patent. A report by the Slovenian Presidency proposed two options regarding translation: one foresees a 'flexible patent', which would allow the owner to decide in which country the claim would be protected, while the second option calls for translation into all official EU languages by an automated computer system. The main difference between the options is that that in the latter, translation had no legal status, contrary to the former.

In parallel to the patent talks, ministers also took note of the progress of the 'Better Regulation' initiative, agreeing that further cutting red tape was vital to Europe's competitiveness. The ministers also agreed to create conditions for reducing the fragmentation of the European venture capital market, which should help overcome the lack of equity and investment capital for financing SMEs.

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

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

EU and Russia strengthen scientific ties

Scientific ties between Russia and the European Union look set to become much tighter in the years to come, according to a joint statement of the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council and Research, which met for the first time on 26 May. On the cards are a set of coordinated calls for co-funded projects in the area of health, and nanotechnologies and new materials. The EU delegates promised to rapidly examine the request by Russia to become associated with the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) and all the relevant issues, including administrative, legal, organisational and procedural requirements.

Gaining 'associated status' would give Russian researchers the opportunity to participate in all FP7 calls for proposals and compete for funding on an equal footing with scientists from across Europe.

Source: <http://cordis.europa7.eu>

Agreement reached on EU mercury export ban

The European Parliament voted to back a compromise deal to ban all mercury exports from the EU in 2011 and improve the safety of surplus storage. The text, a regulation that will directly apply into the EU's 27 national legal systems, has now to be forwarded to environment ministers for a final rubber-stamping at a meeting in June.

The compromise includes adding two compounds – mercurous chloride and mercuric oxide – to the list of substances banned for export, according to a statement by the European Commission. It also brings forward the export ban and storage obligations to March 2011, a few months earlier than originally planned. Exports of mercury mixtures will now also be banned if the other component contains at least 95% of the substance. On the storage aspect, it was agreed that mercury waste should be kept "in a way that is safe for human health and the environment" before eventually being disposed of. Such places include abandoned salt mines, deep underground hard rock formations or specific safe storage facilities above the ground. Permanent underground disposal of liquid mercury will still be a possibility. However, this can only be done if measures to transform the liquid mercury into a solid compound are explored first.

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

Co-operation to be intensified

The South Africa - European Commission Joint Science and Technology Cooperation Committee (JSTCC) has agreed to intensify efforts to promote enhanced research and innovation partnerships between South Africa and the European Union during their meeting in Pretoria, South Africa in May. The JSTCC is tasked to review scientific and technological cooperation between South Africa and the EU and to develop initiatives to improve collaboration.

Looking towards the future, the JSTCC agreed on a number of targeted initiatives to promote future FP7 cooperation in specific FP7 thematic priorities and to strengthen cooperation in the field of research and education networking, notably through the interconnection between the South African National Research and Education Network (SANReN) and the European GEANT2 network. South Africa and the European Commission agreed to undertake renewed efforts to promote exchanges of South African and European researchers using FP7 mobility instruments such as the Marie Curie fellowships and to cooperate closely in supporting the implementation of the Science, Information Society and Space Partnership of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy adopted at the Africa – EU Summit held in Lisbon, Portugal in December 2007.

Source: <http://cordis.europa8.eu>

Tougher EU-wide water quality standards

The European Parliament's Environment Committee has reinstated a list of priority hazardous substances to be banned from water by 2025. Voting on the Commission's proposal for a Directive on water quality standards, the Environment Committee said a further 31 water pollutants, including dioxins and PCBs, should either be considered for the Commission's proposed list of those that must meet EU water quality standards by 2015, or even, if classified as hazardous, be banned from EU surface waters by 2025.

MEPs ask the Commission to table a new legislative propose on standards for all pollutants affecting biotas (living organisms) and sediments once Member States have listed emissions and pollutants in their waters. This contrasts with the stance taken by the Council and the Commission, which sought to limit checks to surface waters, except for three substances that are more hazardous than others when they accumulate in the food chain: mercury, hexachlorobenzene, and hexachlorobutadien.

Source: <http://www.europarl.europa1.eu>

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

MEPs vs food additives

EU rules for authorising food additives, flavourings and enzymes need to be updated and simplified. Foods containing azo dyes should be labelled, and flavourings and enzymes should be authorised only where the consumer benefits, said the Environment committee in a second reading vote on four draft regulations today. Although broadly satisfied with the Council common position, MEPs reintroduced amendments to clarify procedures and improve consumer protection.

The European Commission will manage the lists of approved products subject to risk assessments carried out by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). In addition the MEPs called for a more transparent authorisation procedure.

Source: <http://www.europarl.europa2.eu>

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

Parliament calls for greater gender parity in science

The European Parliament has adopted a report calling for greater efforts to be made to address the under-representation of women in science. The report specifically criticises the 'unambitious and insufficient EU target' of ensuring that 25% of the top science jobs in the public sector go to women, which is far below the widely accepted 40% gender quota. The report calls on the European Commission and Member States to introduce more transparent recruitment processes and ensure gender balance in evaluation panels, selection and other

committees, as well as nominated panels and committees. Specifically the report proposes introducing a non-binding target of at least 40% of women and 40% of men on these committees, thus replacing the previous 25% target.

The report also highlights problems linked to age. Because it is often women who take time out of the careers to devote to their families, many of them find themselves older than their male colleagues in the same jobs. Age limits for awarding grants, for instance, can adversely affect young scientists looking after children, who are, for the most part, women. To correct this anomaly, legislative measures should be considered, suggests the report, such as adding one year to the deadline for applications for each year that a dependant is looked after. Universities, research institutes and private businesses should also adopt and enforce equality strategies in their organisations and conduct gender impact evaluation in their decision-making processes, says the report.

Other actions highlighted by the report include the further development of mentoring and coaching schemes for young female researchers, and career guidance to encourage young girls to start a science career.

Sources: <http://cordis.europa9.eu> and <http://cordis.europa10.eu>

Link: <http://www.embo.org>

Environment Committee takes tough line on airline emissions

The EP Environment Committee voted to reintroduce most of the Parliament's first-reading amendments (previously rejected by the Council) to a proposal to include airline traffic in the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). Members argued that inclusion should begin as soon as 2011, that the share of emission permits to be auctioned should be increased and that that the ceiling on emissions should be lowered.

MEPs also took a more ambitious approach vis-à-vis the cap on airline emissions. Whereas both the Council and the Commission sought to cap emissions at 2004-2006 levels, the Committee voted in favour of lowering the cap to 90% of 2004-2006 levels (a 10% reduction in emissions). Further cuts would be introduced starting in 2013. Finally, the Committee decided that Member States should be explicitly allowed to "maintain or establish other complementary and parallel policies or measures that address the aviation sector's total impacts on climate change".

Source: <http://www.europarl.europa3.eu/>

MEPs give go-ahead to Fuel Cells and Hydrogen JTI

The European Parliament has given its support to the Fuel Cells and Hydrogen (FCH) Initiative, the EU's fifth Joint Technology Initiative (JTI), in May. The new JTI will build on the work of the industry-led European Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Technology Platform (HFP), with a special focus on its implementation plan. This plan foresees a series of actions relating to the development of hydrogen supply and fuel technologies including:

- commercial take-off for early market applications (e.g. handheld devices, portable generators) by 2010;
- stationary applications (domestic and commercial combined heat and power) by 2015;
- mass market roll-out of transport applications by 2020.

Between 2008 and 2017, the FCH JTI will have a budget of €1 billion. The investment will be shared by its two founding members, the European Commission and the European Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Joint Technology Initiative Industry Grouping, a non-profit organisation uniting the sector's key players.

According to the HFP, a Fuel Cell and Hydrogen General Stakeholders Assembly is planned in the middle of October 2008 in Brussels, Belgium, in order to launch the FCH JTI.

Source: <http://cordis.europa11.eu>



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