

EUROPEAN SCIENCE & RESEARCH NEWS

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European science & research news

EU budget agreement contains less radical cuts for FP7 than expected

The agreement reached by EU leaders on the EU budget for 2007-2013 (see article on page 2) came as a positive surprise for the research community as it implied less radical budget cuts for the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) than expected. While the compromise fell short of the doubling of the FP7 budget as proposed by the European Commission, the final agreement states that "EU funding [...] should be increased such that by 2013 the resources available are 75 per cent higher in real terms than in 2006". The Council also supported the Commission's proposal to establish a risk-sharing financing facility for R&D in cooperation with the European Investment Bank (EIB), worth up to 10 billion Euro in order to foster additional investments by the private sector. The summit conclusion states that "particular priority should be given to delivering a substantial and progressive enhancement of the EU's research effort". Despite this positive note, most observers agree that the FP7 budget is not sufficient to achieve the Lisbon Strategy goals. Source: Council Proposal, see: <http://ue.eu.int>

European Parliament Report argues that FP7 cuts go against Lisbon Strategy

The first draft of the report on the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) by the European Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy claims that any reduction to the proposed doubling of the programme budget runs contrary to the Lisbon Strategy and prior declarations of EU leaders. The draft report says that a clear vision and strong leadership needs to be displayed at future Council meetings to secure an adequate budget for FP7. The Committee will vote on the text before it gets its first reading in the European Parliament, which is currently expected to be on 14 March. Source: <http://www.cordis.eu.int>

Austrian Presidency research priorities

The Austrian Government, which has taken over the EU Presidency on 1 January, has stated that it will make every effort to ensure that the Seventh Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development (FP7) will start on schedule. To avoid any interruption between the current framework programme (FP6), which ends in 2006 and the new framework programme, all decisions relating to the programme and its implementation must be taken before 2006. Other priorities of the Austrian Presidency include the monitoring and driving forward the Lisbon target of 3% of GDP investments in research, the adoption of an international agreement on ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) and the adoption of communications regarding the European Space Programme and on Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES).

For more information see the webpage of the Austrian Presidency: www.eu2006.at/Policy_Areas/Competitiveness/Research.html

Commission President Barroso wants to make science as successful as the arts in Europe

In an address to Delft University of Technology, European Commission President Barroso stated that, while the arts sector was flourishing in Europe, in science, Europe was lagging behind its competitors. To reverse this trend the European Commission put forward proposals for initiatives which give a strong boost to science and education in Europe: the creation of a European Institute of Technology (EIT) and a European Research Council (ERC); measures to support innovative firms, in particular small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs); and modernising Europe's higher education sector. Source: <http://www.cordis.eu.int>

EU research and development expenditure stable at 1.9% GDP

In 2004, the EU spent nearly 200 billion Euro on research and development (R&D). R&D intensity (i.e. expenditure as percentage of GDP) in the EU25 stood at 1.90% compared to 1.92% in 2003. R&D intensity remained significantly lower in the EU25 than in other major economies (2.59% of GDP in the US and 3.15% in Japan in 2003). In real terms, R&D expenditure in the EU rose by 1.3% on average per year between 2001 and 2003. In 2003, the business sector was responsible for 54% of total EU25 R&D expenditure (compared to 63% in the US and 75% in Japan). According to the Lisbon Strategy goals, the EU Member States are to achieve an R&D intensity of at least 3% by 2010 and to have two thirds of R&D expenditure financed by the business sector.

To see a graphic representation of the situation in individual countries: <http://eisnet.eis.be/own/graph/2005/en12/eure;3014;392.pdf>

European Commission publishes proposal for simplified rules for participation in FP7

The European Commission has published a proposal on the rules for participation in the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), laying out simplified contractual arrangements for participants in FP7. Provisions have been simplified in the following areas: intellectual property; grant types; audit certificates and rules on dissemination,

use and access rights. The number and size of documents will be reduced and variations in the presentation of the same information in different documents will be avoided.

To read the proposal in full: http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0705en01.pdf

Chirac calls for increased research in digital and energy sector

In a New Year's address French President Jacques Chirac set a number of ambitious targets for research in the area of digitalisation and energy. He called for the development of a digitalisation strategy which would make France "one of the most advanced nations in terms of digital technologies". Concerning energy, Chirac said that France must do more to make renewable energy a reality and continue with the building of the ITER reactor as well as with the development of a fourth generation of nuclear reactors. Source: <http://www.cordis.eu.int>

European Research Council appoints Chairman of Scientific Council

The European Research Council (ERC), an initiative to boost excellence in European research, has elected Fotis Kafatos, from Greece, as Chairman of its Scientific Council. The two elected Vice-Chairs are Helga Nowotny from Austria and Daniel Estève from France. Source: 'Bulletin Quotidien Europe', No 9083, 7 December 2005

EU policy developments affecting science & research

European Council agrees on Financial Perspectives for 2007-2013

After lengthy negotiations, European Union leaders reached agreement on the EU's Financial Perspectives for 2007 to 2013 at the EU's Council Summit meeting which concluded in Brussels on 17 December. The European Union's budget for the period from 2007 to 2013 was fixed at 862.6 billion Euro or 1.045 % of the EU's Gross National Income (GNI). The figure is 22 billion Euro below the compromise proposed by the Luxemburg Presidency and 273 billion Euro less than the original European Commission proposal in 2004.

The text of the agreement can be accessed on: <http://ue.eu.int>

European Parliament votes against EU budget agreement

On 18 January the European Parliament overwhelmingly rejected the agreement reached by EU heads of government in December and called for negotiations over the funding level and spending plans of the Financial Perspectives for 2007-2013. Members of Parliament were particularly critical about the budget level of 862 billion Euro agreed by the Council, which was well below the 975 billion Euro proposed by the Parliament. Negotiations on the Financial Perspectives will continue in a meeting on 23 January between Parliament President Borell, Commission President Barroso and Austrian Chancellor Schüssel.

For more information see: <http://www.europarl.eu.int>

Developments in thematic areas of potential relevance for Australia

Fighting Brain Drain in Europe

The European Commission held technical briefings and public events from 14 to 16 December 2005 to highlight the issue of brain drain of European researchers and to present measures aimed at supporting researchers working in Europe and at attracting researchers from across the globe. These measures include: the "Researchers in Europe 2005" campaign, Marie Curie scholarships, the Era-More network of mobility centres, the acceleration of the visa-application process, special admission procedures for non-European researchers and the publication of a Code of Conduct and Charter for Researchers. On 16 December, France's largest research organisation, CNRS, signed the Code of Conduct and Charter for Researchers in the presence of Commissioner Potočnik in a public ceremony.

For more information on EC measures against brain drain see http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/researchersineurope/index_en.htm

Highlights on upcoming S&R events

Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF) 2006, 15-19 July 2006, Munich Germany

The second Euroscience Open Forum, organised by Euroscience, a grass-roots scientific organisation open to any citizen interested in science and technology and its links with society, will be held in Munich from 15-19 July 2006. The Forum will run parallel to Germany's national science week. See: <http://esof2006.org/>

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