

EUROPEAN SCIENCE & RESEARCH NEWS

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European science & research news

Independent expert group calls on European leaders to take radical action on research and innovation

In a report submitted to the European Commission on 20 January, an independent expert group chaired by former Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho called for a 'Pact for Research and Innovation' to be signed by political, business and social leaders 'before it is too late'. According to the report a new vision was needed to address a number of economic and social challenges faced by Europe. The reason that business is failing to invest enough in R&D and innovation in Europe is the lack of an innovation-friendly market in which to launch new products and services. To redress this situation, the group proposes a four-pronged strategy focusing on the creation of innovation friendly markets; on strengthening R&D resources; on increasing structural mobility as well as fostering a culture that celebrates innovation. The group was set up by the European Commission following the European Council Summit at Hampton Court and was asked to advise on ways to boost the EU's research and innovation performance.

The report is available at: <http://europe.eu.int/invest-in-research>

Experts propose measures to increase the role of philanthropy in research

An expert group set up by the European Commission found that too little attention is given to the role of foundations, trusts and charities in research and made recommendations as to how this could be increased. Among the measures proposed were a better tax and regulatory environment, targeted donation campaigns and better mechanisms for attracting such funds to research. The report entitled "Giving More for Research" was released on 6 February by an expert group set up by the European Commission as part of the Action Plan for More Research and Innovation adopted in October 2005. The report will be discussed at a conference on 27-28 March.

The report is available at: <http://www.europa.eu.int/invest-in-research>

EURAB recommends change of approach to unleash potential of research organisations

The European Research Advisory Board (EURAB) stated in a recent report that research and technology organisations (RTO) could contribute more to the European Research Area (ERA), if European research policies were better adapted to realising their potential. The report makes recommendations on how to raise the profile of research organisations which affect the profile of RTOs; their visibility towards the European Commission; EU policies & programmes and operational independence. EURAB proposes to organise two policy conferences, one on the role of the RTOs in European R&D and the other on cooperation between RTOs and universities.

The report is available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/eurab/index_en.html

EU Structural Funds to support research and innovation

Addressing a conference in Warsaw on 13 February, EU Commissioner for Research, Janez Potočnik, and his colleague responsible for Regional Policy, Danuta Hübner, urged the EU's least competitive regions to use EU Structural Funds to invest in research and innovation. The EU Structural Funds (the second-largest EU programme after the EU Agricultural Programme) can be used to support research infrastructures, human resources, innovative campaigns, science parks, incubators or specific research projects in eligible (less-developed) regions. While it is not possible to use funds from the Framework Programme for Research and Development for a project funded by Structural Funds, regions are encouraged to make use of both programmes to fund different phases of an infrastructure programme. Potočnik called on countries and regions to establish R&D priorities to achieve synergies between the Framework Programme and the Structural Funds. Source: <http://www.cordis.eu.int>

New CNRS President pledges to put science back at the top of agenda

The newly appointed President of the French national centre for scientific research (CNRS), Catherine Bréchnac, has promised to put science back at the top of the organisation's agenda, to work in partnership with universities and other organisations and to push ahead with planned reforms aimed at consolidating the number of CNRS departments. The appointment ends the crisis over the resignation of the previous incumbent, Bernard Meunier and the dismissal of the former Director General Bernard Larrouturou. Source: <http://www.cordis.eu.int>

Germany sees increase in foreign research investment

A study by the German Institute of Economic Research has found that foreign investment in research conducted in Germany rose from 11.5 billion Euro in 2001 to over 12 billion Euro in 2003. In addition, one in four researchers working in Germany is employed by a foreign company. The study also found that German companies

substantially increased their investment in research abroad during the 1990s. The country now invests 11 billion Euro outside of Germany each year, a figure which is expected to increase. Source: <http://www.cordis.eu.int>

EU policy developments affecting science & research

European Commission President Barroso presents Annual Progress Report on Growth and Jobs

On 25 January, the European Commission presented its new Annual Progress Report on the Lisbon Strategy, the partnership between the EU and its Member States for growth and more and better jobs. The progress report provides an analysis of the 25 new National Reform Programmes submitted by Member States; highlights the strengths in the different programmes and identifies shortcomings, as well as remedial actions. It flags four priority action areas: investment in education and research; freeing up SME and business potential; employment strategies and guaranteeing secure and sustainable energy supply. In the area of education and research individual EU Member States are asked to commit to additional measures (national and EU) at the March EU Summit, i.e.:

- Increase investment in higher education to 2% of GDP by 2010 (from the current 1.28%), including by removing barriers to universities seeking complementary private funding
- Set a clear target for overall R&D expenditure for 2010
- Spend a greater share of state aids (25%) and structural funding on R&D
- Create a European Institute for Technology by the end of 2007
- Give greater priority to the teaching of mathematics and foreign languages in schools to raise the marketable skills of EU citizens

The full text of the report is available on: http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/index_en.htm

For a full set of National Reform Programmes, please see: http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/nrp_2005_en.pdf

Proposal for creation of European Institute of Technology faces criticism

In early February European Commission President Barroso proposed the creation of a European Institute of Technology which would act “as a pole of attraction for the very best minds, ideas and companies from around the world”. While Commission officials are currently finalising the plans for the “flagship knowledge project”, leading universities and EURAB, the Commission’s advisory body on research, have criticised the project. Critics fear that the EIT might distract from the objectives of the newly created European Research Council (ERC) which they see as a better way of channelling money to centres of excellence in the EU. Governments in the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK are anxious that any new EIT is a “virtual” entity that devolves work to existing centres of excellence.

Source: “EU plans for technology institute put to the test”, Financial Times, 12 February 2006

Developments in thematic areas of potential relevance for Australia

European Commission aims to boost competitiveness of mechanical engineering in Europe

The European Commission has established ‘EnginEurope’, an expert group to assess the challenges facing the mechanical engineering sector in Europe, a key enabling industry for Europe’s overall competitiveness. As part of ‘EnginEurope’, industrialists, EU member states representatives, trade unionists and academics will examine the strengths and weaknesses of Europe’s mechanical engineering industry and the challenges it will face over the next ten years. They will propose measures to promote its competitiveness and to maintain the high level of employment in the mechanical industry in the EU. The mechanical engineering sector in Europe directly employs 2.4 million people in some 23.000 companies, and is a world leader with 41 per cent of the global market.

Source: <http://www.cordis.eu.int>

More money and coordination for security research

On 9 February, the European Defence Agency (EDA) held its first conference on research and technology. At the conference Secretary General and EU High Representative Javier Solana said that research and technology were key to transforming EU armed forces and that the EU needed to “spend more, spend better and spend more together”. EU Commission Vice President Günter Verheugen reiterated that coordination was needed between the civil and defence-related security research, as well as between the national and the European level. In this context the Commission and the EDA were currently working on long-term strategic research agendas for their respective security research domains.

Source: Bulletin Quotidien Europe No. 9129, 11 February 2006