



EUROPEAN SCIENCE & RESEARCH NEWS

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European science & research news

EU compromise on stem cell research clears way for approval of FP7

On 24 July, the European Council reached a political agreement on the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development 2007-2013 (FP7), backing EU funding for embryonic stem cell research. Following the compromise, EU funding for embryonic stem cell research will continue under the current case-by-case evaluation practice, prohibiting research into human cloning, research resulting in heritable changes and research for the purpose of stem cell procurement. No activity will be funded from EU Member States where stem cell research is illegal. The agreement on FP7 was reached by a small majority as Austria, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Slovakia voted against. Germany and Italy had given up their earlier opposition. The EURATOM nuclear research activities for 2007-2011 were agreed unanimously. See: <http://cordis.europa.eu>

European Research Council names first Secretaries General

On 31 August, the newly created European Research Council (ERC) announced the appointment of its first two Secretaries General. Professor Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker, currently President of the German Research Foundation (DFG), the largest research funding agency in Europe, will take on the position in January 2007. Professor Andreu Mas-Colell, President of the European Economic Association and Professor for Economics at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, will be Secretary General from July 2009 to December 2011. The Secretary General will work together with the heads of the Scientific Council and the Director of the ERC's executive body in the implementation of the ERC strategy and work programme. For more information see: http://erc.europa.eu/index_en.cfm

European companies set to increase their R&D investment over next three years

A survey by the European Commission and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) published on 23 August shows that European companies expect their global investments in R&D to grow by about 5 percent over the next three years. This contrasts with growth of only 0.7 percent for R&D investment reported in the *2005 EU Industrial Investment Scoreboard*. The European Commission questioned more than 400 companies in ten major industrial sectors about their R&D investment intentions. For more information on the *EU Survey on R&D Investment Business Trends* see: <http://iri.jrc.es>

Finland presents new national strategy for continued innovation

In July, the Finnish Government outlined a new national strategy to refresh the country's successful innovation agenda. The goal is to increase R&D intensity (research investments as proportion of GDP) from the current 3.5 percent to 4.0 percent by the end of the next decade. Across the EU, the average investment on R&D has only been at 1.9 percent of GDP in 2004. The strategy aims to make an impact in five key areas: promote the innovation system and its ability to renew itself; enhance competence base; improve quality and focus of research; promote introduction and commercialisation of research results; and secure economic prerequisites, including human resources. The priority areas of research are Strategic Centres of Excellence in energy and the environment; metal products and mechanical engineering; forest clusters; health and well-being; and information and communication industry and services. For further information on the report see: http://minedu.fi/OPM/Tiede-ja_teknologiainuovosto/?lang=en

Germany launches high-tech strategy

On 30 August, the German Minister for Education and Research, Annette Schavan presented a national 'High-Tech Strategy' with which Germany will invest EUR 14.6 billion in high-tech research and industry. The strategy addresses five areas: strong cooperation between science and business; an increased involvement in innovation in the private sector; the dissemination of leading technologies; the internationalisation of R&D; and funding for talented individuals. It targets 17 innovative fields including health research, optical technologies, environmental technologies, information and communication technologies, aeronautics, transport, nanotechnology and biotechnology. For more information on the strategy see: <http://www.ideen-zuenden.de>

EU policy developments affecting science & research

European Commission launches ambitious 10-point innovation plan

On 14 September, the European Commission issued '*Putting knowledge into practise: A broad-based innovation strategy for the EU*' which calls for urgent action at regional, national and European levels. The plan had been requested by EU heads of state at the Spring Council in March 2006 and is based on a report by the expert group under the leadership of former Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho which was published earlier this year. In the plan the Commission calls on EU Member States to address the following issues: establish innovation-friendly

education systems; establish a European Institute of Technology; develop a single market for researchers; strengthen links between researchers and industry; nurture regional innovation through the new cohesion policy programmes; reform State aid rules for R&D and innovation and provide better guidance for R&D tax incentives; improve protection for intellectual property rights; copyright levies for digital products and services; develop a strategy for innovation-friendly 'lead markets'; and stimulate innovation through public and private procurement. The document will be discussed by EU heads of state at their informal meeting in Finland on 20 October. See: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/index_en.htm

ASEM agrees to enhance cooperation on innovation, science and technology

European and Asian leaders at the Sixth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM6) in Helsinki on 10-11 September discussed ways to enhance cooperation in the fields of innovation, science and technology and emphasised the importance of the EU Research Framework Programmes. The importance of health research cooperation was underlined in particular with regards to highly pathogenic avian influenza. Other related issues were energy and climate change. The leaders agreed to look into the possibility of a follow-up to the first Science and Technology Ministerial Conference which took place in 1999. For more information see: <http://www.asem6.fi>

EU-Japan round table agrees on research priorities

Business leaders from the EU and Japan met in Tokyo from 13-14 July as part of the EU-Japan Dialogue Round Table (EJBDRT) and identified five priority areas, four of which relate to research: ensure societal benefits from innovation in the Life Sciences and Biotechnology; develop R&D links, standardisation and a regulatory environment in the area of ICT; develop rules for intellectual property rights; and develop joint research projects in the areas of biochemistry, biomaterials and biofuels. For more information see: <http://www.eujapan.com/europe/roundtable.html>

EU-China Summit agrees on increased cooperation in FP7

The Ninth EU-China Summit in Helsinki on 9 September agreed that the China National Long and Medium Term Plan for Science and Technology Development and the EU Seventh Framework Programme on Research and Development (FP7) will be used to increase cooperation between the EU and China. A China-EU Science and Technology Year will be launched in October 2006. The two sides are already partners in several international cooperation projects, including Galileo and ITER. See: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/china/intro/index.htm

Developments in thematic areas of potential relevance for Australia

EU, US and Canada announce joint genetics collaboration

The European Commission, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Genome Canada have announced a global collaborative research effort which aims to increase the understanding of the role of genes in a range of diseases. The initiative which is the biggest collaborative research effort after the Human Genome Project, has a budget of EUR 56.6 million of which EUR 13 million come from the 'Life Sciences, Genomics and Biotechnology for Health' thematic programme under the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6). Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu>

European Commission outlines Joint Undertaking for European contribution to ITER

On 22 August, the European Commission published the proposals for the creation of a Joint Undertaking to provide the European contribution to the ITER international fusion energy project. Its primary task will be to meet Europe's obligations towards ITER, by working with European industry and research organisations to supply the components for the construction of ITER, and to administer the EU's financial contribution. The Joint Undertaking will be based in Barcelona and start work in 2007. See: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fusion-for-energy.html>

Extremely Large Telescope moves one step closer

The construction of a European Extremely Large Telescope (ELT) has moved one step closer with the creation of a project office to drive the project. The ELT will have a primary mirror of 30 to 62 metres in diameter and will cost around EUR 750 million. The project is coordinated by the European Southern Observatory. See: <http://www.eso.org>

Highlights on upcoming S&R events

European Researchers Night, 22 September 2006

For the second time, the European Commission is supporting events across Europe to celebrate 'European Researchers Night'. On 22 September, 30 events will take place in 21 European countries which will give the general public the opportunity to find out more about the fun of science and to be "scientists for a night".

For more information see: http://ec.europa.eu/researchersineurope/index_en.htm

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