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European science & research news

New data on science, technology and innovation performance show continued stagnation of EU R&D intensity

On 11 June 2007, the European Commission (EC) published "Key figures 2007 on Science, Technology and Innovation", a set of statistical data on the European Union's (EU) R&D performance relative to its main competitors. Its main conclusions are:

- EU R&D intensity has stagnated since the mid-nineties. In 2005, only 1.84% of GDP was spent on R&D in EU-27 and it still remains at a lower level than in the US, Japan or South Korea. Also new emerging economies such as China are rapidly catching-up.
- Over 85% of the R&D intensity gap between the EU and its main competitors is caused by differences in business sector R&D financing, namely the low level of private R&D expenditure in Europe which is mostly due to differences in industrial structure and to the smaller size of the high-tech industry in the EU.
- The EU is still the world's largest producer of scientific knowledge, but the impact of European science is lower than that of the US: the EU lags behind in terms of citation impact scores and highly-cited publications; EU universities are underrepresented at the top of a ranking of the world's largest universities; and the linkage between patents and the science base is much weaker (especially concerning high-tech industries).
- Even though private sector funds are a notable part of R&D, the public sector still has a major role to play. Public R&D funding in the EU must be sustained in order for private R&D activities to develop further and grow on a solid science base.

The report can be found on: http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/monitoring/statistical01_en.htm

Portuguese EU Presidency priorities in science and research

On 1 July 2007, Portugal took over the European Union Presidency for the following six months. Its priorities in the areas of science and research are as follows:

- To stimulate the development of policies and programmes to increase public and private investment in R&D and mobilise human resources in science and technology;
- To renew Europe's science policy agenda in four areas: a European policy on publishing science and technology information; a European endeavour on nanosciences and nanotechnology; the reform and modernisation of universities; and a new impetus to basic research through the European Research Council.

For more information see the following websites: http://www.eu2007.pt and http://cordis.europa.eu/

European Commission and European Investment Bank launch risk-sharing finance facility

On 5 June 2007, the EC and the European Investment Bank (EIB) signed an agreement establishing the new risk-sharing finance facility (RSFF) to support research and innovation in Europe. This new instrument will fund higher risk European research projects conducted under the EU's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) with up to EUR 2 billion between 2007 and 2013. The RSFF will be open to all private and public entities, but is expected to benefit in particular medium and large companies with extensive research undertakings. See: http://www.eib.org/rsff

Study on national funding for high-risk research in Europe

About 40 national research agencies in Europe are funding high-risk, highly innovative research according to a study financed by the EC. The 'High Innovation/Gain/Expectation Program' (HInGE) survey identified funding agencies that claimed to have specific programmes supporting novel or 'risky' research projects. Agencies are providing funding between EUR 1 million and EUR 10 million annually. See: http://www.nest-promise.net/

Association agreements signed with EU Seventh Framework Programme

A number of non-EU countries have recently signed association agreements with the EC to enable their researchers to participate in FP7 on the same conditions than EU researchers. These are: Turkey, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Israel.

EU policy developments affecting science & research

European Parliament holds back creation of European Institute of Technology until viable budget proposed

On 10 July 2007, the European Parliament's industry, research and energy committee backed the EC proposal to set up a European Institute of Technology (EIT), but requested further changes before considering adoption of the proposal in plenary this autumn, i.e.:

- that the EC draws up a "stable financing concept" for the EIT's budget of EUR 308.7 million for 2008 to 2013 using unspent community funds, rather than existing programmes (like the EU Framework Programme, the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme, or the Lifelong Learning Programme);
- that the 'Knowledge and Innovation Communities' (KICs), made up of education and research institutions and industry, should be legally autonomous from the EIT and consist of at least three partner organisations based in at least two EU Member States (with at least one higher education institution and one company);
- that the EIT is renamed to "European Institute of Innovation and Technology".

Source: http://www.euractiv.com and Bulletin Quotidien Europe No. 9466, 12 July 2007

European Parliament says that Galileo should be entirely funded by the EU budget

In a resolution adopted on 20 June 2007, the European Parliament dismissed the EC's proposal to secure the remaining funds for the European satellite navigation system Galileo (EUR 2.4 billion out of a total budget of EUR 3.4 billion) by combining Community funding with additional intergovernmental resources. Instead only the EU's budget should be used to fund Galileo and the Commission should submit a revised financial framework to be agreed upon by the Parliament and the Council. Source: http://cordis.europa.eu/

New approach needed towards science teaching in Europe says expert group

An expert group set up by the European Commission to examine the declining interest in science studies among young people in Europe, concluded that a new approach towards science teaching was needed. The report calls on policy makers across Europe to radically break with traditional pedagogic methods and to introduce inquiry based-science education programmes in schools. The expert group was led by Michel Rocard, former French Prime Minister and Member of the European Parliament, and presented its report on 12 June 2007.

The full report is available on: http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.topic&id=1100&lang=1

Developments in thematic areas of potential relevance for Australia

European Commission launches consultation on responsible research in nanosciences and nanotechnologies

On 19 July 2007, the European Commission announced a public consultation on responsible research in nanosciences and nanotechnologies which will be open until 21 September 2007. The consultation will provide input on a possible Code of Conduct for this emerging area of science which the Commission will put forward later this year. The Code of Conduct would express basic principles for nanotechnology research and would invite EU Member States and interested parties to take concrete action for a safe development and use of nanotechnologies.

Internet site of the consultation: http:/europa.eu/synapse/directaccess/science-and-society/public-debates/nano-recommendation/
The consultation paper on: http://ec.europa.eu/research/consultations/list_en.html

European Commission launches consultation on European ICT competitiveness

On 3 July 2007, the European Commission launched a public consultation on ways to strengthen the global competitiveness of Europe's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industries by ensuring access to global markets. The Commission seeks to capture stakeholder views on market access and on regulatory issues, so as to refine its EU strategy for international cooperation on ICT. The consultation is open to all stakeholders, including from industry, research and consumer organisations and will close on 17 September 2007.

Internet site of the consultation: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=3475

European Commission adopts new guidelines for coal and steel research

On 10 July 2007, the European Commission has adopted a proposal for a Council Decision on the revised guidelines for spending funds on coal and steel research. The Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS) has an annual budget of EUR 60 million for research in these areas. The RFCS is a separate, complementary programme to the EU's Framework Programme on Research and covers all aspects of coal and steel, including environmental protection. Proposals can be submitted any time with a cut-off date of 15 September every year. Third countries may participate, but do not receive any European financial support. See: http://cordis.europa.eu/coal-steel-rtd/home.html

Highlights on upcoming science and research events

European Congress on Biotechnology, 17-19 September 2007, Barcelona, Spain

The 13th European Congress on Biotechnology will take place from 17 to 19 September in Barcelona, Spain. It will focus on the symbiosis between science, industry and society in the area of biotechnology. See: http://www.ecbn13.eu

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