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Brussels News Update

June 2009

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Competitiveness Council Conclusions

ERIC

The European Commission has welcomed the recent agreement of the Competitiveness Council on a community legal framework, which defines the criteria for a research infrastructure to qualify as a European Research Infrastructures Consortium (ERIC) and their governing rules.

Recognised European research infrastructures will be granted the status of international organisations, and the related advantages such as VAT exemption. An ERIC must be made up of at least three member states, and may include qualified associated countries, other third countries and specialised intergovernmental organisations. The Council has also highlighted the important role research infrastructures in boosting regional development and stressed the importance of analysing the socio-economic returns and cost effectiveness for the host region as well as for Europe as a whole.

FPs

On the evaluation and impact assessment of European research framework programmes (FPs), ministers invited the Commission to 'clearly and explicitly acknowledge, when designing new FPs, the extent to which this work is based on evaluation results, foresight studies and impact assessments'. It was noted that while simplification was introduced between FP6 and FP7, reduction of administrative complexities in the FP management procedures requires further attention.

ERA

On the development of the ERA, ministers encourage Member States and the Commission to 'further engage in ensuring enhanced complementarity and synergies between Community policies and instruments as well as between regional, national and intergovernmental initiatives.'

Intellectual Property

The Council had discussions, among other items, on the establishment of a Community patent and a unified patent litigation system. In this regard, a political agreement was reached for requesting an opinion to the European Court of Justice on whether the envisaged legal instrument to be concluded is compatible with the EC Treaty.

Energy

On the energy front, the ministers have called for more and better application of energy efficient technologies across the board – in homes and buildings, in industry and transport and for the production, transmission and distribution of electricity. The Council's conclusions will be incorporated into the European Commission's industrial policy.

Sources: <http://cordis.europa.eu/1> <http://www.ipr-helpdesk.org/html>
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/1.pdf>

Links: <http://bulletin.sciencebusiness.net/1> <http://www.euractiv.com/en/1>
<http://pr.euractiv.com/files/.pdf> <http://www.euractiv.com/en/2>

Council adopts the "EU Blue Card"

The Council has today adopted a directive aimed at facilitating conditions of entry and residence in the EU of third-country citizens for the purpose of highly qualified employment. The directive establishes more attractive conditions for third-country workers to take up highly qualified employment in the member states of the Union, by creating a fast-track procedure for issuing a special residence and work permit called the "EU Blue Card". The Blue Card will facilitate access to the labour market to their holders and will entitle them to a series of socio-economic rights and favourable conditions for family reunification and movement across the EU.

Source: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/2.pdf>

Ministers agree SME 'impact assessment' for new laws

All new legislation should be vetted to ensure it does not make life difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), according to industry ministers. It was agreed that thorough impact assessments and cost-effectiveness analyses should be carried out on national legislative and non-legislative proposals to determine their potential impact on business.

Describing SMEs as the backbone of the European economy, ministers said they should be "respected and considered" when setting up framework conditions for industry.

The Competitiveness Council said that companies should be given adequate time to adapt to any new requirements before legislation is introduced, in accordance with the 'Think Small First' principle contained in the Small Business Act introduced last June.

Ministers also asked the European Commission to monitor the impact on business of the REACH regulations on chemicals, "especially SMEs, taking into account the current economic situation".

Discussing the impact of the financial crisis on small companies, the Competitiveness Council said banks should be encouraged to resume "normal lending activities" as a condition of state support.

Source: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/3.pdf>

Link: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/3>

SMEs and funding from FP7

The European Commission Directorate General for Research will soon publish new figures about the participation of Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the Cooperation Programme of the 7th Framework Programme for Research (FP7). In the first two years of FP7 they have already participated more than 6000 times. SMEs from all over Europe have been selected to receive funding. They have reached a funding rate of 12.3 % of all participants and have so far received more than € 1 billion; a figure which will continue to rise.

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/1>

ECHA's Stakeholders' Day

During the second stakeholders' day of European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), participants have identified the urgent need for companies to work together and share data in order to prepare joint dossiers for the registration of each chemical substance.

At the request of industry, ECHA launched an awareness campaign, called "the clock is ticking – form your SIEF now", which intends to raise awareness of the urgent need for action if companies are to meet the first substance registration deadline of 30 November 2010. The campaign banner is available to download from ECHA's website and is free for all to use. Industry associations and national helpdesks are particularly encouraged to join the campaign, which seeks to promote examples of best practice from companies who are well advanced in the registration process. It will also provide additional support for companies who are the so called Lead Registrants – the company taking the lead in developing the registration dossier on behalf of all the other companies who manufacture or import the same substance.

In conjunction to the Stakeholders Day, two new web sections were launched:

Help section- providing access to all the technical documents and support needed when companies prepare and submit their dossiers to ECHA.

SIEF section – giving a brief overview of the critical information on SIEFs (Substance Information Exchange Fora) and how to prepare for registration under REACH.

In addition, the Publications section of the website has been revamped and the publications are

now grouped under nine main headings: administrative documents, brochures, fact sheets, guidance documents, newsletters, press material, Q&A documents, technical manuals and reports.

The next stakeholder event in late autumn 2009 will focus on the Classification and Labeling of Substances.

Source: <http://echa.europa.eu/doc/1.pdf>

Chemicals and the Baltic region

The European Commission has adopted the proposal for a EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region focusing on an environmental clean-up of the sea and energy interconnections. This is the first time that a comprehensive Strategy, covering several Community policies, is targeted on a 'macro-region' and it may provide a blueprint for other regions, like the Danube or the Mediterranean. The strategy identifies four pillars for EU action: environmental sustainability, economic prosperity, geographical accessibility and attractiveness, and making the area safe and secure.

The accompanying action plan identifies 15 priority areas and eighty flagship projects, which have been tagged for implementation and will be reviewed regularly.

The pillar 'to make the Baltic Sea Region an environmentally sustainable place' covers the following priority areas:

1. To reduce nutrient inputs to the sea to acceptable levels
2. To preserve natural zones and biodiversity, including fisheries
3. To reduce the use and impact of hazardous substances
4. To become a model region for clean shipping
5. To mitigate and adapt to climate change

A number of actions regarding the reduction of hazardous substances include the full implementation of the key Directives and Regulations relating to chemicals (in particular in the aquatic environment). Other cooperative actions will be the restriction of hormone-like substances, further to an analysis of the sources, flows and impacts of pharmaceutical products in the marine environment and the continuation of the research on hazardous substances of specific concern to the Baltic Sea.

Amongst the top priority flagship projects are:

The early phasing-out in the Baltic Sea of use of phosphates in detergents in countries where this is not yet the case as recommended by HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan" - (HELCOM - the Helsinki Commission - Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission) - with the aim of reducing nutrients in the sea.

Cleaner waste water by identifying, building / upgrading priority Waste Water Treatment Plants around the Baltic Sea to remove phosphorous and nitrogen (including reaching 0.5 mgP/l treatment efficiency). In addition the functioning of existing Waste Water Treatment Plants is to be improved, taking into account the HELCOM ongoing process, its requirements and timetable.

Sources: <http://ec.europa.eu/2.pdf> <http://ec.europa.eu/3>

Link: <http://www.euractiv.com/4>

Global Helsinki Chemicals Forum

Organised by the Chemicals Forum Association in cooperation with the EU Commission and its Chemical Agency ECHA, the first global Helsinki Chemicals Forum (HCF) has focused on four main themes with important consequences for the chemical industry and the use of chemicals globally: competitiveness and innovation, chemical industry regulation, safety and sustainability and chemistry and consumers. The aim of the HCF is to shape a 'Helsinki Agenda' for safe and sustainable development, manufacture and use of chemicals. The Forum has so far identified a clear need for more global chemical industry regulation, for new reliable instruments regarding global information transfer and for increasing consumer awareness regarding safety. It has also noted that the new innovations by the chemical sector should be based on customer needs and that value chain clusters are needed for effective development work. The agenda is currently being drafted.

Sources: <http://finnexpo.multiedition.fi/1.php> <http://finnexpo.multiedition.fi/2.php>
<http://finnexpo.multiedition.fi/3>

Link: <http://www.euractiv.com/5>

Safer chemical management

The second International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM2) has made progress in several key areas and has defined its priorities for future work. ICCM2 evaluated the implementation of Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), a policy framework for safe production, deployment and disposal of chemicals and part of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). ICCM2 also addressed emerging policy issues (nanotechnology, chemicals in articles, lead in paint and electronic waste), pledged to improve the management of perfluorinated chemicals and stressed that more funding was needed to help developing countries implement the SAICM.

Source: <http://www.unep.org/> **Link:** <http://www.euractiv.com/en/6>

Putting European R&D at the service of sustainable development

Opening a conference on sustainable development in Brussels, European Commissioner for Science and Research, Janez Potočnik challenged a mixed audience of scientists, representatives from NGOs and industry and R&D policy makers to put European R&D at the service of sustainable development whereas a report delivered at the conference highlighted the need for greater involvement of stakeholders in policymaking. The conference outcomes are expected to feed into keeping sustainability at the centre of research policy.

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/4>

Employ-RES study: Renewables and economic benefits

A study on the impacts of supporting renewable energy sources (RES) on the economic growth and employment in the European Union (Employ-RES) was carried out on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Energy and Transport. Its key conclusions are: Policies that support renewable energy sources (RES) provide a significant boost to the economy and the number of jobs in the EU.

Stronger policies are needed to reap maximum economic benefits from RES.

Improving current policies, so that the target of 20% RES in final energy consumption in 2020 can be achieved, will provide a net effect of about 410,000 additional jobs and 0.24% additional gross domestic product (GDP).

Sources: <http://cordis.europa.eu/2> <http://europa.eu/rapid/5>
<http://ec.europa.eu/6.pdf> <http://ec.europa.eu/7.pdf>

Link: <http://www.euractiv.com/7>

Acceptance of United Nations draft climate treaty

Source: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/8>

European Polar Summit

An event looking at the implications of the development of the European Research Area and its impact on a future European Union Arctic Policy.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/3>

Collaborative industry/academic PhDs on the rise

Source: <http://bulletin.sciencebusiness.net/2>

Programme to promote use of IP for economic growth in Africa

A Japanese-financed programme has been set up to promote the use of intellectual property (IP) as a catalyst for economic and commercial development in Africa and Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Source: <http://bulletin.sciencebusiness.net/3>

REEEP to fund 49 clean energy projects

The Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP) is to fund forty-nine new clean energy projects in 25 countries, helping to kick-start the uptake of renewables and improve energy efficiency in emerging markets. This funding round, REEEP's seventh, is the largest ever, representing a 46 per cent increase over its sixth disbursement of funds in June 2007.

Source: <http://bulletin.sciencebusiness.net/4>

€246 million for a fast development of better medicines

A total of 15 new research projects aimed at bringing innovative medicines more quickly to the market have been selected to receive €246 million from the European Commission and the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) within the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI). This initiative marks the first time that pharmaceutical competitors are pooling their resources, together with research organisations, patient groups and other stakeholders in large consortia, in order to develop generic, pre-competitive knowledge. The Commission's contribution of €110 million is backed up with €136 million provided in-kind from the pharmaceutical industry. The selected projects address a variety of issues and diseases: four focus on training, and three will work on issues relating to drug safety and effectiveness. On the disease front, there are projects on diabetes, cancer, pain, psychiatric disorders, neurodegenerative conditions, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Contract negotiations for the projects are ongoing and should be concluded by the end of this year.

A second IMI call for proposals is due to be launched in autumn 2009.

Sources: <http://europa.eu/rapid/8> <http://cordis.europa.eu/4>

Link: <http://www.euractiv.com/9>

Future bioeconomy

A new report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warns that governments and industry must break down the barriers, which are presently holding back the further development and commercialisation of biotechnologies.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/5>

DREAM and food models

The DREAM ('Design and development of realistic food models with well-characterised micro- and macro-structure and composition') project consortium aims to create physical and mathematical food model standards to facilitate the risk/benefit assessment and nutritional quality of foods in all major categories (plant-based foods, meat, dairy and cereal products). Funding for DREAM comes from the 'Food, agriculture and fisheries, and biotechnology' (KBBE) theme of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) and amounts to €6 million.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/6>

PV-ERA-NET

PV-ERA-NET is a European network of programme coordinators and managers in the field of photovoltaic solar energy (PV) research and technological development (RTD), comprising 17 partners from 11 countries with more than 20 national and regional RTD programmes. The mission of PV-ERA-NET is to carry out activities towards sustained co-ordination and co-operation between national and regional programmes in the field of PV RTD in the European Research Area (ERA).

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/7>

Tender on inherent skin sensitisation potential of chemical substances □□

The Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) has published a call for tenders for the development of methodologies to assess the inherent skin sensitisation potential of chemical substances.

Source: <http://cordis.europa.eu/8>

Businesses urged to embrace 'green innovation'

Euractiv report on the recent European Policy Centre debate in Brussels.

Source: <http://www.euractiv.com/10>

Next Commission president 'must champion innovation'

Euractiv report on the recent conference on innovation and the climate crisis.

Source: <http://www.euractiv.com/11>



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