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Research Connection 09

Success stories of EU funded research programs

“Vision is not enough, it must be combined with venture”, Vaclav Havel

During the European Council held in March 2000 in Lisbon, the Member States of the European Union decided to make the EU “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010”. The “Lisbon Strategy” was born. Within this frame, several programs, structures and agencies were created to implement the agenda. The creation of an European Research Area (ERA) is underway to respond to the need to integrate research programs and to stimulate Europe wide cooperation among research institutions, industry and SMEs. Framework programs are the main instrument the European Commission (EC) uses to co-finance research, technological development and demonstration projects. The current Framework Program is the seventh (FP7): it started on

2007 and will last until 2013 with a total budget of 50 billion of Euro. A substantial increase with respect to previous programs. Grants are determined on the basis of calls for proposals and a peer review process. Moreover, activities funded from FP7 must have a “European added value”, i.e. they must be transnational research projects. Main goals of FP7 are to strengthen the scientific and technological base of European industry and to encourage its international competitiveness, while promoting research supporting EU policies. The Research Connection 09, organized in Prague by the Czech Presidency of the EU, presented several success stories of projects financed under the FP6 and the FP7 in the thematic areas Health, Food and Food Safety, Biotechnology, Environment, New Materials and Processes, Space & Security, Energy, Information Society, Science and Society, Science Ethics, Science Communication, ERA Nets, Transport, Euratom, Joint Research Centre and many more. The event brought together something like 2000 people: scientists, industrialists, research managers, members of the EC and the press. Besides a dense program of specific parallel sessions a series of press conferences were organized to present to the press several researches, their results and possible practical applications and implications. An exhibition with over 50 stands of sectors of the European Commission involved with research, companies,

research institutions, research clusters and consortia financed by the FP6 or FP7 completed the event. The event was inaugurated at the Congress Centre of Prague, near the castle of Vyšehrad, by the EU Commissioner for Science and Research Mr. Janez Potočnik and the Czech Vice Minister of Education, Youth and Sports Mr. Vlastimil Růžička. In his speech Mr. Potočnik made the point on the stage of the seventh Framework Program and its achievements. “There is no alternative to better collaboration in European Research”, said Mr. Potočnik, adding “We are facing new threats, and new global challenges. It is up to us in the research community – both the “new” and “old”, the “big” and “small” Member States – to adapt and build a new EU sustainable and profitable research ecosystem. We need

to connect”. During his analysis the Commissioner pointed out that only 10 percent of the 36.000 FP7 applications received until now came from the EU-12 countries, i.e. those countries which joined the Union on and after May 1st 2004. Mr. Potočnik thinks that the causes of this level of participation being far lower to the share of these countries with respect to the total of research workforce in the EU-27 is mainly due to the poor networks and connections. The Vice Minister Mr. Růžička on his side, pointed out how important it is to make careful choices when financing research, which should ultimately serve to increase the amount of money spent on developing human potential. Mr. Jeremy Rifkin, president of the Foundation on Economic Trends, held the inaugural lecture providing a picture of our environmental, economic and energy crises and suggested a visionary perspective of a “third industrial revolution” (3IR): “What’s required now is a new economic vision that can address the enormity of this moment in history” he claimed, adding that “a third industrial revolution must get underway very quickly if we are to stave off some of the more dire consequences of global warming”. According to Mr. Rifkin economic revolutions have all been made possible by technological breakthroughs along with advances in communications allowing to share knowledge. It is now possible to realize 3IR thanks to major advances in renewable energies, to the grid technology and to satellite and wireless communications technologies. To achieve a breakthrough a revolution of the entire existing infrastructure (energy, housing, transport, manufacture, etc.) will be necessary. Decentralizing the infrastructures is the key point of Mr. Rifkin’s solution: renewable energies (solar, eolic, geothermic, etc.), which are universally distributed, can merge with internet and other communication technologies that are also distributed, to create a novel model of non centralized energy production. As an example, each house could be adapted to collect power from various sources and feed it back into the grid when an excess of power is produced. One major problem is represented by the huge cost of such revolution, which, as Mr. Rifkin stated, will run into the trillions, and the endeavour will need to be paid for by a combination of public and private funding. According to Mr. Rifkin, the EU is emerging as a major leader in this third industrial revolution. With its firm commitment to renewable energies and its investment in hydrogen energy storage technology, it is, Mr Rifkin said, “leading the world in sustainability”.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. http://ec.europa.eu/research/conferences/2009/rtd-2009/index_en.cfm
2. <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/>



EU Commissioner Mr. Janez Potočnik, Mr. Jeremy Rifkins, Vice Minister Mr. Vlastimil Růžička.

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