

Belgian Presidency Research

**Press conference
for presentation of the principal axes of the Presidency:**

**Themes
Agenda
Initiatives**

**by
BENOIT CEREXHE**

**Brussels, 23 June 2010
BIP
Place Royale, 2-4
1000 Brussels**

Introduction

Europe is at crossroads. In order to face major societal challenges and get out of the crisis whilst preserving its social model and taking into account the sustainability of the environment, it has to opt for a new kind of growth of which the engines will be knowledge and innovation and to an ever lesser extent the exploitation of depletable natural resources.

The Belgian Presidency will adhere to this perspective in particular in the field of Research and will in particular aspire to build bridges between research, innovation and higher education, in order to even better develop our European research potential and better turn it into results in terms of economy and employment. Research is important in Europe and of high quality, but it leads to a lesser extent than elsewhere to results in terms of economy and employment. Indeed, if it's true that innovation constitutes a major stake for the future competitiveness of industry and services, and thus for well-being and employment in Europe, Community policy in innovation remains too fragmented and lacks a real integrated approach, both on the level of instruments and actors.

To respond to this, the Commission is about to propose a European Research and Innovation Plan, that should be deposited in September of this year, in order to fuel the European Council of Heads of State and Government in December.

In order to struggle against fragmentation of innovation policies, the European Commission proposes to focus on the major societal challenges such as climate change, energy problems, health, demographic challenges, rarefaction of resources, or still the struggle against social exclusion.

It is our wish to prepare a common European vision of priorities in the face of these major challenges and to encourage the creation of partnerships where supply and demand could meet. It would not be about creating new instruments (there are already too much of them) but about better linking support programs in favour of research and innovation.

Given the importance of the future Research and Innovation Plan, we have foreseen to make it the principal subject of the informal ministerial meeting that will be organised in Brussels from 14 until 16 July 2010. Moreover, in order to strongly emphasize the wish of better fine-tuning Research and Industry, the Belgian Presidency will bring together the Ministers in charge of Research and Industry, in an informal Council jointly presided by my Colleague Jean-Claude Marcourt (on behalf of Industry) and myself.

The objective is to evolve towards a political agreement between the 27, in the form of joint conclusions of the Competitiveness Council (implying both the Industry section and Research section). Afterwards these conclusions are to be transformed in «key messages» addressed to the European Council of December.

We want to accomplish this with an ambitious mind for a Europe of Research, by favouring a broadening of convergences between national and regional research policies, and the one conducted at the European Union level.

Also in the field of research, it's more Europe we need and not less, and in particular in the face of major challenges (climate change, demographic issues, lengthening of life expectancy, rarefaction of energy resources and others, struggle against social exclusion,...), there is an evident need to unite our efforts.

I. European Strategy 2020

The European Council of 25 and 26 March has decided to give a central place to knowledge, among the key objectives of the new 2020 Strategy, as a means to guarantee growth and subsequently the well-being of future generations. The European Union reaffirms at the highest level that it is essential to improve research and development conditions, in order to bring the accumulated level of public and private investments in this sector in particular to 3 % of GDP. This objective remains valid:

- to support public expenditure with regard to research;
- to mobilise the industry, because it is especially with regard to the expenses of companies that the objective of 3% (2% of the 3%) is not reached;
- because the principal competitors of the European Union set themselves a similar goal (3% in the United States; 4% in Japan; 5% in Korea).

From now onward, in the hope of finally reaching the 3%, the European Council of 25 and 26 March has asked the Commission to establish a complementary indicator on the intensity of R&D and innovation, with the aim of directing more research investments towards innovative products and services.

What matters is not only the quantity of money spent, but also the efficiency of the means, and still more, the achieved results. The 3% objective therefore should be better steered and it should be provided with a more qualitative dimension, whether it be concerning the definition of the objectives or the indicators on a European and national level. Among these more qualitative objectives, attention could be paid to the actions of intereuropean cooperation, or still to the quality of higher education.

Within the framework of the new 2020 strategy, the European Council will hold periodical debates about the economic situation and the principal priorities of the strategy. In December 2010, it will deal with research, development and innovation.

The Belgian Presidency wants to send out a strong message about Research and Innovation towards the European Council. This message will be similar to the « Research » section and the « Industry » section. That's why the informal « Competitiveness » Council that will take place in Brussels from 14 until 16 July, will have a joint section « Industry-Research ».

The Belgian Presidency wishes to take advantage of this opportunity to:

- emphasize the importance – even and especially in this period of crisis – to continue to support financially research and innovation policies as a long term investment;
- better fine-tune research and its economic and social repercussions within an integrated approach of innovation;
- reinforce convergence of research and innovation policies of Members States and the European Union, more specifically but not solely with regard to the major societal challenges.

II. The European Research Area

With the Lisbon Treaty, research policy has become an objective in itself and it is no longer only there to support the competitiveness of companies. Moreover, the new Treaty provides for a judicial base for the European Research Area and enables the Commission to increase its capacity to take initiative with regard to the realization of this Area for 2020, in particular:

- that there is more coherence and synergies;
- that will be fully effective what is called the « 5th freedom » (free movement of researchers and knowledge);
- that the excellence of European universities and research centres and their competitiveness is supported on a global scale;
- that the climate should be made more in favour of research investments;
- that the citizen could perceive the results.

So the vital question is that of a broader convergence of European research policies and the degree of voluntarism that we are ready to invest. The 27, are they ready to jointly schedule a part of their national or regional research budgets? It is not possible to confront the major challenges of our time by just being satisfied having found the lowest common denominator between the 27. On the contrary, more should be achieved with regard to convergence between Research policies of the Member States and the European Union. With regard to this, it is interesting to emphasize the teachings of the last Eurobarometer, published in February 2010. When asked to indicate, among 20 domains, the decision level that seems most efficient to them, 72% of Europeans mention scientific and technological research as one of the domains that should be jointly managed at the level of the Union, in second position just after the struggle against terrorism (80%) and before the protection of the environment (70%).

Our Spanish colleagues in particular dealt with the issue of **mobility of researchers**, more specifically for a better coordination, at the heart of Member States with regard to social security of researchers, pensions, flexicurity, ... The issue of mobility will be followed up by the Belgian Presidency, in particular under the angle of the removal of administrative obstacles for the mobility and for the careers of researchers. A conference on this theme is planned in November 2010.

A second section concerns **governance** of the European Research Area, in particular the steering instruments that have to be put in place to achieve better convergence of policies. Under Belgian Presidency, we will emphasize this governance of the European Research Area and the joint programming.

With regard to the governance of the European Research Area, we will ask the following questions: «do we need for instance political steering in addition to the new “Council of the European Research Area”? How this new organism is going to achieve an integrated steering of the “knowledge triangle” (research, innovation, higher education)? Which evaluation criteria and which indicators to measure accomplished progress in the realization of the ERA? What openness of the ERA towards external partners of the Union?

The joint programming consists of increasing cooperation and coordination between Member states, through the implementation of common initiatives in which we can retrieve the major societal challenges. In this stage, 4 themes of joint programming are defined:

- The first is dedicated to 'Alzheimer's disease and has the value of a pilote project.
- The 3 other themes proposed are: Agriculture, food security and climate change; health, food and the prevention of food related diseases; cultural heritage, climate change and security.

The Belgian Presidency wishes to set out a new course which is needed and which in the future will enable to progress to a large extent within these 4 domains.

In general, concerning the European Research Area, the Belgian Presidency hopes to provide for integrated conclusions or a progress report at the « Research » Council of November. This will be nourished by the themes mentioned above, as well as by the results of several conferences organised under Belgian Presidency:

- the « Presidency » initiative, dedicated to the role of universities and research centres in the European Research Area.
- a conference on Joint Programming, at the initiative of the Walloon Region;
- a conference on mobility of researchers, organised with the federal services for Scientific Policy.

By the way, it's also on the 26 of November that we will be able to proceed to the launching of a pilot cooperation initiative with India about the challenges linked to water and that aims at an improved coordination of instruments, resources and expertise of Member States and of the European Union with regard to scientific and technological collaboration with India.

III. Simplification

Everybody, to start with the Commission, agrees today that the European programs and their participation rules have achieved a degree of complexity that frustrates the objectives. Multiple procedures, too many controls and a waiting period that is too long to pass the agreements and benefit from funding, result in discouraging researchers. For example, the objective of a participation of small and medium enterprises at a level of 15% to the Framework Research Program has not been achieved. This simplification effort is essential for the Regions as well, because the Regions are often the closest level for the operators, notably SME, research centres or universities.

Simplification is also necessary in order to increase synergies between the funded projects on behalf of Research and those that are funded out of structural funds.

Therefore the Belgian Presidency wishes to progress as far as possible in the domain of simplification.

We have also decided that simplification would be the second theme of the informal «Research» Council of July, with the intention to present new conclusions containing advancements with regard to simplification at the Council of 12 October.

Other themes

Sustainable development

The sustainable development theme will first of all be retrievable in a transversal manner in the Belgian Presidency files, because it's on the agenda of the 2020 strategy, of the Research and Innovation Plan and in the priorities of the joint programming. This theme of sustainable development will not be exclusively transversal but will be outlined into several more precise aspects:

- The SET plan (strategic plan to improve collaboration between the EU and the Member States on energy technologies, in the perspective of accelerating research in low carbon technologies) that will be at the heart of the European Summit of energy technologies;
- A conference on marine and maritime research, as well as on biodiversity, will be organised in Brussels and in Ostend on 12 and 13 October this year.
- Belgium will organise the second « Knowledge Based Bio-Economy » conference, with a special focus on life sciences and biotechnologies.

The ITER-file

The ITER Council of 16 and 17 June in China has not taken a decision concerning the financial aspects: therefore an extraordinary meeting of the ITER Council will be organised on 27 and 28 July in Carache in France.

Space

A Council "Space" will take place in November because the Belgian Presidency wishes to pay particular attention to the implementation of a European spatial policy (EU-ESA relationships, spatial exploration, space and security).

Raising awareness with regard to sciences

In numerous countries of the European Union the number of students choosing for a scientific education is in decline, or in relative decline, when compared to other educational domains. This is also the case in Belgium, both at the Dutch and French speaking side. For example: the last 20 years, the number of university students in the domain of exact sciences has diminished with about 8 % in the French Community; and between 2000 and 2008, the number of graduates in the domain of exact sciences has dropped with 27 % in the Flemish Community. In comparison to the whole of educational domains, the percentage of graduates in exact sciences has passed from 19,0% to 12,8%. This curbing of disinterest for scientific education, almost observable in the whole of Europe, should be stopped and reversed.

In the framework of Brussels regional competences, the Minister in charge of scientific Research has decided to take advantage of the Belgian Presidency in order to develop a certain number of sensitization actions on the importance of sciences and the career possibilities they offer.

Some examples:

- an appeal for projects was launched and addressed to schools, youth movements, teacher associations and other non-profit organizations that stimulate the attractiveness of sciences, and associated education and professions;
- a billboard and multi-media campaign on the theme "*Plus tard, je serai.../Later word ik...*" (*Later I will become*), aiming at warming up young people for scientific careers;
- a photo exposition of researchers planned from the beginning of September on the fences of the Parc de Bruxelles; this exposition aims at depicting researchers out of a different angle, seeking to tackle prejudices that some may have concerning a professional research career.
- a series of online interviews of researchers from Brussels ;
- the creation of a 6 meters high reproduction of the Ishango bone, first known « calculator » in the world;
- several other events during the six forthcoming months.

Promotion of Brussels as a technological hub

The Presidency of the Research section of the Competitiveness Council, managed by the Brussels-Capital Region, constitutes also a formidable opportunity for Brussels to position and display itself as a hub for research and advanced technology in Europe. The Brussels-Capital Region wishes to take fully advantage of these six months in the spotlights to communicate and promote the quality of Research and technological activities that take place on the territory of the Brussels Region.

On behalf of this, a new website will be launched and a document will be presented to those who visit Brussels in the context of their professions associated with the exercise of this Presidency: The « Etat de la Recherche à Bruxelles » (state of the proceedings of Research in Brussels), aims to be a « visiting card » document about what is going on, with regard to research and innovation in Brussels, and at the federal level and level of Belgian communities included. The core is « *Brussels, place to be for Research and Innovation* ». It presents the whole of activities associated with research and innovation in Brussels in a dynamic way.

To make this presentation vivid and to avoid to make it a catalogue, the choice was made to interview the actors (companies, universities, institutions), about their most emblematic realizations, by emphasizing the three key sectors of the Regional Plan for Innovation, namely life sciences, ICT and Environment. The target audience of this visiting card is: the European partners and all the people responsible present at Brussels.

Principal events of the Presidency in the field of Research

A series of official meetings and labeled events in the framework of this «Research» Presidency will take place in Brussels and elsewhere in Belgium. A detailed overview of these events is provided in the annexe of this document.

Let's keep in mind the following and most important meetings:

- 7 July, the official inauguration of the Belgian Presidency for the Research section. It will take place at the Bourse in Brussels.
- The informal Industry-Research Council on 15 July 2010, that will assemble the 27 Research ministers and the 27 ministers in charge of Industry at Tour & Taxis.
- The "ICT 2010" conference organised by the European Commission on information and communication technologies, that will take place at the end of September and will assemble more than 5000 participants.
- Our "Presidency Initiative", about the role of universities and research centres in the establishment of the European Research Area.
- Federal initiatives such as a "Research" Council, a ministerial conference on spatial exploration or a conference on the mobility of researchers.
- Conferences on bio-economy or on marine and maritime sciences, organised by the Flemish Region.
- Initiatives from the Walloon Region, for example with regard to nanotechnologies or joint programming.
- Without taking into account the multiple private or non-governmental initiatives that apply for the Belgian Presidency label...