



## ERA-LINK USA NEWS – AUGUST 2008

### EDITORIAL MESSAGE

The summer is almost over and ERA-Link is getting ready for the new academic season. We will start with a European researchers' get-together in Chicago on September 15. On October 17-18, the Delegation of the European Commission will co-sponsor an EU/US Research and Education Internationalization Workshop at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. You will find all the details about those, and other ERA-Link events, in this issue.

We also have news on how the European Commission plans to facilitate cooperation between national research programs, and on developments in the EU/Mexico research collaboration. As a follow-up to the American Society of Plant Biologists annual conference last June, we interviewed the Association's Executive Director, Dr. Crispin Taylor.

Please check the "Research Careers and Other Employment Opportunities" section in this issue for information on new recruitment procedures that will be implemented by the European Personnel Selection Office in 2010. Selection competitions will focus more on testing the personal and professional competence of candidates.

*The ERA-Link USA team.*

[http://cordis.europa.eu/eralink/about\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/eralink/about_en.html)

<http://www.eurunion.org/policyareas/science.htm>

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## **FEATURES**

### **European Commission unveils plans for cooperation between national research programs**

The European Commission has set out its plans for boosting cooperation between national research funding programs under the new "Joint Programming" scheme. The new scheme is designed to ensure that public research funds are used as efficiently as possible, and to help Europe tackle shared problems more effectively.

At this time, just 15% of public research funds in Europe are allocated at the European level, either through the EU's own framework programs, or through intergovernmental organizations such as CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research), or pan-European schemes like EUREKA. The remaining 85% is locked-up in programs that are designed and implemented nationally. Currently, there is little collaboration between these national research programs, although many of the challenges they address are shared by all European countries.

The new Joint Programming Initiatives will see the Member States combine resources and monitor and review progress together. Membership of the initiatives will be entirely voluntary, and the emphasis will be on pooling public research funds (unlike the Joint Technology Initiatives, which combine public and private research funds).

The plans will now be discussed by Europe's research ministers, who are expected to endorse the concept and objectives of Joint Programming by the end of the year. The ministers will then appoint a group of experts to identify the areas for which Joint Programming is most suitable. This selection will be made on the basis of clear criteria; for example, the challenge to be addressed must be pan-European or global in scale, yet be sufficiently focused so that clear objectives can be set. Publicly funded research must be key to addressing the problem, and the initiative will help overcome fragmentation and duplication of research efforts in the field. The first Joint Programming Initiatives should be launched by 2010.

The Joint Programming scheme is just one of five launched by the Commission as part of its plans to reinvigorate the European Research Area (ERA). The others are the management of intellectual property by public research organizations; research mobility and research careers; pan-European research infrastructures, and international science and technology cooperation. (SOURCE: CORDIS)

To download the Communication, please click [here](#).

### **New developments in EU-Mexico scientific collaboration**

**On July 15, the European Commission proposed to establish a Strategic Partnership with Mexico in order to enhance dialogue and coordination between EU and Mexico on global, regional and bilateral issues. Stronger scientific collaboration is one of the goals of the Partnership.**



Scientific communities from both Mexico and the European Union have been used to develop close relationships since the 1970's. These are

supported by an important number of bilateral programs that finance exchanges and mobility between both regions.

As a consequence, Mexico's major S&T cooperation efforts are nowadays leaning towards Europe, with more than 17 agreements signed by CONACYT and various Member States of the European Union, and more than 65 per cent of the Mexican researchers' mobility being oriented towards the European continent.

On the basis of this strong tradition of exchange, one of the new challenges is how to take advantage of these existing bilateral collaborations so as to enhance a strong strategy of internationalization of Mexican Science throughout the world, and consequently, how to focus our efforts on strategic issues. By the same token, endorsement of a stronger cooperation at a state-of-the-art collaborative research level is also a main goal.

One of the starting points that has prompted this reflection has been the signing, in 2004, of the Agreement in Science and Technology Cooperation between the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT), on behalf of the Mexican Government, and the European Commission. This Agreement is aimed at "encouraging, developing and facilitating cooperative research and development activities in the science and technology of common interest between the Community and Mexico."

In order to support this objective, several projects and programs have recently been negotiated between CONACYT and the European Commission, such as a €20-million bilateral cooperation program (FONCICYT: Fondo de Cooperación Internacional para la Ciencia y Tecnología Unión Europea – México) to finance a consortia composed of Mexican and European research institutes and enterprises (also open for other countries). Another project is the Bureau for European and Mexican Science and Technology Cooperation (UEMEXCYT) whose purpose is to assist Mexican researchers in taking full advantage of the available European Union cooperation programs that are dedicated to RTD issues.

Other issues include the identification and close work with the diasporas, both Mexican and European. Recent efforts have been deployed by the National Council for Science and Technology, and the Representations of the Member States in Mexico, to identify this European community in order to better inform them about the opportunities offered by the European Research Areas abroad.

**Today, approximately 300 European researchers are currently working in Mexican RTD institutions** in a wide variety of areas. Nevertheless, the main areas of scientific expertise that have been identified are linked with environment, food and agriculture, biotechnology, health and socio-economic sciences.

Enhancing the added value of the diasporas would build stronger bridges and networks between scientific communities of both regions, and involve them in collaborating with worldwide institutions on topics of high impact to society and global issues. Furthermore, the diasporas can definitively play a key role in the consultation processes for identifying priority areas of common interest to Europe and Mexico and to propose strategic topics for financing.

As a consequence, the Bureau UEMEXCyT, jointly with the Representations of the Member States in Mexico, organized last June 30th the first Infoday for the European

diaspora in Mexico. Taking into account the enthusiasm showed by the 50 participants, it has been decided to invite them to form part of the ERA-LINK Network coordinated from United States. (Author: Aurélie Pancera)

For further information, go to:

<http://www.conacyt.mx/uemexcyt/Biblioteca/files/Eventos/30-jun-08/Agenda.pdf>,

or contact Angel Cardenas Cravioto: [acardenas@conacyt.mx](mailto:acardenas@conacyt.mx)

## **The Jean Monnet teaching, research and information projects on European integration have been selected**

The Jean Monnet Program was originally launched in 1990, with a goal to stimulate excellence in teaching, research and reflection on European integration in higher education institutions throughout the world, and to support institutions and associations focusing on issues related to European integration. During its early years, the program was limited to the EU member states, but by 2001 it was extended to all candidate countries and the rest of the world. The purpose of this expansion was to encourage universities throughout the world to explain the European model of peaceful coexistence and integration, as well as EU policies and external action. Between the years 1990 and 2006, the Program has helped to set up approximately 2,850 teaching projects in the field of European integration studies, bringing together a network of 1,800 professors, and reaching audiences of 250,000 students every year.

The 2008 selection of the new Jean Monnet teaching, research and information projects on European integration has been recently completed. Among others, the funding will be provided to:

- New Jean Monnet Chairs, Modules, Centres of Excellence, and Multilateral Research projects in European integration studies
- New Jean Monnet Information and Research projects (mainly conferences, seminars, roundtables on European integration)

The Program is now active in 61 countries on the 5 continents. As a worldwide action, the 2008 Jean Monnet selection involves successful projects in:

- The candidate countries: Croatia, Macedonia, and Turkey
- ENP countries and Russia: Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine
- Other third countries: Canada, China, Iceland, New Zealand, South Korea, United States

To find out more about the Jean Monnet program, please go to:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc88\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc88_en.htm)

or [http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/structure/monnet\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/structure/monnet_en.html)

To download a Jean Monnet brochure, please go to:

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/monnet/success-stories\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/monnet/success-stories_en.pdf)

## **Spain's scientific boom**

Research, development and innovation (RD&I) is set to be boosted in Spain as the country's ministry for science and innovation announced its national RD&I plan for the 2008-11 period. The plan will award over 47bn euros to RD&I projects over four years, double that of the preceding four-year period. The plan comes in addition to Cenit, the 45bn-euro program for national strategic consortia in technical research, and to the EU's 7th Framework Program for research and technological development (FP7), which will award grants of around 50.521bn euros across the EU between 2007 and 2013. Last year, 230m euros of FP7 funding went to Spain.

Spain's Barcelona is one of the leading centers of this scientific boom, and the region of Catalonia has proven to be among the most successful regions in Europe in attracting the ERC (European Research Council) young investigators' grants.

To read a "Nature" article titled "Catalonian powerhouse", please go to

<http://www.nature.com/naturejobs/2008/080710/full/nj7201-248a.html>

## **ERA-Link REPORTS**

### **Interview with Dr. Crispin Taylor, Executive Director of the American Society of Plant Biologists**

Last month ERA-Link News reported on the annual conference of the American Society of Plant Biologists in Merida, Mexico. While in Merida, we had an opportunity to interview Dr. Crispin Taylor, the Executive Director of ASPB, and an ERA-Link member.



#### **What are the main lessons to be learned from the Plant Biology 2008 annual conference?**

ASPB's strong interest in collaboratively addressing national, hemispheric ("American" writ large...), and indeed global needs related to plant biology are well indicated – and were well met – by holding the annual meeting in Mérida, Mexico. Plant scientists from almost 40 countries attended the meeting (see [http://www.aspb.org/meetings/pb-2008/attendees\\_BYCOUNTRY.cfm](http://www.aspb.org/meetings/pb-2008/attendees_BYCOUNTRY.cfm)), reflecting ASPB's status as a truly global organization and our richly international

membership.

Among other things, by holding its annual meeting in Mexico, ASPB learned that to successfully cooperate with entities outside the US, it is important to embrace national, organizational, and cultural differences and, thereby, to gain from them.

#### **How is the ASPB addressing global issues for which plant biology could play a role?**

As an organization, ASPB itself provides venues for addressing global needs that can be addressed through basic and applied research on plants. The Pan-American Congress on Plants and BioEnergy (<http://www.aspb.org/meetings/bioenergy08/>), which immediately preceded the annual meeting in Mérida, represents just one example of an ASPB activity aimed at addressing the larger topic of global climate change – and one that seems likely to continue with its strongly international and interdisciplinary flavors.

More broadly, in recognizing its global commitment and its obligation to serve foreign members, ASPB established an International Affairs Committee (IAC) in 1999 and formally constituted it in 2002. The chair of the IAC serves on ASPB's Executive Committee, the society's principle governance group.

In seeking to address world hunger, ASPB works with the US Congress and the Executive Branch to seek needed funding for plant research that will lead to more bountiful yields of more nutritious food crops. These efforts are aimed at supporting the research interests of individual ASPB members and other plant scientists, whose studies are aimed at enhancing the nutritional value of food crops grown in the developing world (cf. the "Tropical Agriculture" and "Biology of Tomato and Solanaceous Species" symposia at PB'08).

ASPB's journals are also richly international fora for plant biology research. Well over half the articles submitted to and published in the journals are submitted by plant scientists outside the US. Reflecting this, ASPB recently appointed Cathie Martin, a researcher at the John Innes Institute in Norwich, UK, as editor-in-chief of *The Plant Cell*, the world's leading basic plant biology research journal.

ASPB (and its affiliated Education Foundation; see <http://www.aspb.org/education/foundation/>) are also active in education and public outreach in the US, Europe, and elsewhere.

### **How many European scientists are members of the American Society of Plant Biologists?**

ASPB is delighted to report that it has 667 members – almost 1/6 of its total dues-paying membership – in Europe, including the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

ASPB will be exhibiting at the upcoming FESPB meeting in Finland, in large part to learn more about what it is we are already doing well to support the aspirations of our European members and what we could be doing better.

### **What are the challenges and opportunities for strengthening transatlantic cooperation in plant biology?**

One type of opportunity is to build substantially on existing mechanisms aimed at fostering transatlantic cooperation, whether for discussion (such as the US-EC Task Force on Biotechnology Research); for scientific exchange (e.g., various publicly and privately financed schemes that allow exchange of personnel); or in the jointly conceived and promoted funding of richly collaborative, long-term research projects – i.e., the same kind of approach US federal agencies have taken to jointly develop funding programs that address mutually held objectives and priorities, but organized instead between the EU and the US governments and designed in a manner that will

establish and sustain strong bilateral connections between plant scientists, their institutions, and their funding agencies.

Another type of opportunity is to learn from each other. Clearly public perceptions to some aspects of applied plant biology – GMOs, for example – differ markedly on different sides of the Atlantic. Why is this? What can scientists and advocates on both sides of the ocean learn from one another in their efforts to help guide and shape public perceptions? Perhaps plant biology organizations on both sides of the Atlantic could provide opportunities for member exchanges to address some of these issues.

The same issues, of course, represent challenges to substantive trans-Atlantic cooperation, although at the level of the plant scientists themselves (as distinct from their governments or publics), I expect there is stronger coherence on many subjects.

Beyond trans-Atlantic cooperation, ASPB is actively exploring the possibility of convening a global summit of leaders of plant biology organizations. Such a summit would have as its primary objective the identification of areas of common global interest addressed by plant biology/plant biologists, particularly in the realms of global climate change, food and water security, biofuels, and/or plant diseases.

Presentations from the European Symposium at the Plant Biology Annual Conference, Merida, Mexico, 29 June 2008 are available on our website: [http://cordis.europa.eu/eralink/events\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/eralink/events_en.html).

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

### **European researchers' get-together in Chicago, 15 September 2008**

On 15 September 2008, ERA-Link USA will host a European researchers' get-together in Chicago. The event will be held in the Polish Consulate at 1530 N. Lake Shore Drive (<http://www.polishconsulatechicago.org/index.asp>), at 6:00-8:30PM. Welcoming remarks by Consul General Zygmunt Matynia will be followed by a presentation on "Recent Directions in European Research" by Dr. Laurent Bocheureau, Counselor, Head of Science, Technology & Education, Delegation of the European Commission in Washington DC. Izabella Zandberg, ERA-Link USA Project Manager will introduce our network, and describe services offered under the new umbrella of EURAXESS Links. A networking reception will follow. All ERA-Link members are cordially invited to attend. RSVP: [delegation-usa-era@ec.europa.eu](mailto:delegation-usa-era@ec.europa.eu) by September 12, 2008.

### **FP7 Workshop at the Society for Neuroscience Annual Conference in Washington, DC, 15 November 2008**

ERA-Link USA and the Brain and Related Diseases Unit of the EC Directorate General for Research will co-host an exhibit booth at the forthcoming SfN Annual Conference in Washington, DC, 16-19 November 2008.

On Saturday, November 15, at 9:00AM-noon, the DG for Research, Brain and Related Diseases Unit, will offer a workshop on "EU Funding Opportunities in Brain Research." An ERA-Link USA sponsored lunch reception will follow the workshop. (<http://www.sfn.org/am2008/skins/main/pdf/preliminary/glance.pdf>)

We cordially invite all European scientists attending this year's SfN annual conference to join us for the workshop on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November and visit our booth during the conference (we will be in booth number 3237).

## **EU/US Research and Education Workshop, Georgia Tech, Atlanta, 17-18 November 2008**

In an increasingly globalized economy, science and technology careers extend beyond national boundaries. Universities and research institutes worldwide are addressing these developments by setting up exchange programs, double and/or joint degrees, and foreign campuses. Several EU-U.S. co-operation ventures promote the training and mobility of researchers and are likely to be further developed.

On 17-18 November, the Delegation of the European Commission, together with Georgia Tech, the National Science Foundation, the French Embassy to the United States and the French Presidency, will co-host a workshop devoted to the issues of internationalization of research and graduate studies. The workshop will be held at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. All research leaders and policy makers at universities, research institutes, companies, agencies, and research promotion organizations concerned with international exchange of researchers, as well as scientists with experience of conducting research abroad, are invited to attend.

The workshop will address the following questions:

- How to stimulate the development of transatlantic degrees to attract more talented young people into science careers?
- What innovative curricula are needed to prepare the next generation of scientists and engineers to engage in global R&D careers?
- What scientist mobility schemes can best contribute to the building of lasting transatlantic networks of excellence?
- How the transatlantic mobility of scientists can contribute best to innovation in a global context?

Each session will feature an introductory speaker from the EU and United States with three additional short presentations from each side. All participants are invited to contribute during discussions.

For more information, and to register, please go to:

<http://www.dlpe.gatech.edu/EUUS-Workshop/>

## **FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND FELLOWSHIPS**

### **Current calls for proposals**

To access a full list of currently open calls for proposals launched by the European Commission, go to: <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm> or [http://www.interfaceurope.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=97&Itemid=130](http://www.interfaceurope.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=97&Itemid=130)

## **RESEARCH CAREERS**

### **Good news for future job seekers: The European Personnel Selection Office adopts major improvements to its selection methods**

In a bold shake up of its current practices, EPSO will significantly change the way it selects people to work in the European civil service. **From 2010**, selection competitions will focus more on testing the personal and professional competence of candidates. The time taken to select candidates is also to be cut by two-thirds from 15 months to just 5 to 9 months.

The most significant change is in the type of testing that will be used to select applicants. At present, written examinations and interviews focus on the specialized knowledge of candidates. In the future, focus will also be put on assessing the practical and professional competence that candidates possess, and their likely job performance.

The current 2-year time span for selecting and recruiting candidates is to be significantly shortened. The competition itself will take 5 to 9 months, depending on the type of job. To achieve this, competitions will be organized in regular annual cycles. This will not only streamline the organization of the tests, but also assist candidates in planning and preparation. There will be separate cycles for administrators and linguists (university graduates), and assistants (secretaries and technicians).

Each cycle will have two stages: computer-based testing (including abstract, verbal, and numerical reasoning, and professional skills tests) and cognitive interviews at an assessment center. Current "pre-selection" testing of candidates prior knowledge of the EU is to be discontinued.

The second stage of assessment will allow the candidates to demonstrate their know-how and individual expertise by engaging in a number of group and individual exercises. For administrators and linguists, in-house assessment centers will be organized, while assistants and specialists will go through a set of tests focused on their professional and practical competence.

To find out more about the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO), please go to: <http://europa.eu/epso>

### **EURAXESS Jobs**

If you are a researcher planning your next career move, the EURAXESS portal provides links to information on career and grant opportunities in science and technology in European countries.

For further details, please go to: [http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index_en.cfm)

## **ABOUT ERA-LINK USA**

**ERA-Link USA is a network of thousands of European researchers, scientists and scholars throughout North America. This multidisciplinary network includes members at all stages of their careers. It allows them to connect with each other and with Europe - ensuring that they are recognized as an important resource for European research, whether they remain in the U.S. or return to Europe.**

**For further information about ERA-Link USA, please visit:**  
[http://cordis.europa.eu/eralink/about\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/eralink/about_en.html)

## **ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER**

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