

The European Research Area: New Perspectives

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Keeping attention to knowledge, to R&D, high on political agenda is a must. Knowledge society is not an abstract term. It is an inclusive concept - the only one allowing us to address our future challenges involving clear need of nature preservation, high social security standards and maintained or even increased global competitiveness in an inclusive way.

I'm here today to present to you the Commission's vision for the future of the European Research Area. But before I tell you what it is about, I will first make clear what it is not about.

It is not about reinventing the concept of the European Research Area - the first principles outlined in 2000 remain valid today.

It is not about creating a single European research policy, run centrally by the Commission - that's not the way to improve things in the research field.

It is not about shifting away from the Lisbon goals - our priority remains a dynamic knowledge-based economy geared towards growth and jobs, where at least 3% of GDP is invested in research.

What it is about is giving the EU a fifth freedom - the free movement of knowledge (besides goods, services, capital and people).

The fragmentation of the European research system along national and sector lines is an unacceptable cost that harms our efforts to develop in a positive direction. If we could overcome this, the impact would be enormous. If we take energy as an example, working together more on research could see Europe making a real difference to reducing carbon emissions and moving towards an energy system based on renewable sources. And this potential would not only be positive for our environment, it would put European industry right at the very front of what is going to be a massive global market.

So what do we want when we talk about knowledge as the fifth freedom?

We want researchers to be free to work wherever they can in the EU, free from worries that their careers can be penalised rather than rewarded when they move around.

We want universities and other research organisations to have more freedom to decide who to recruit, who to work with, and what subjects to focus on.

We want Europe to have high class, world standard research infrastructures that are open to researchers from across Europe and act as magnets for talent from around the world.

We want the fruits of research to be able to move around Europe as freely as more tangible commodities, so businesses can identify and co-operate easily with the researchers doing work that is relevant to them. We want the outcome of European research to be more freely available so that the most can be made of it.

We want Europe to work together better in the research field, so that the research funds we have are used as effectively as possible. This means joint priority setting, joint programming and freeing up access to national programmes.

Finally, we want Europe to be seen as an open, dynamic, quality partner in science for the rest of the world.

The themes covered by the Green Paper are wide-ranging, and our goals are ambitious. But moving forward in this field isn't just some nice idea that we should get round to dealing with some time. We need to act now. This is a fundamental necessity if we are to maintain global industrial leadership and our quality of life. The seriousness of the task before us demands a high level of ambition.

Today we are starting a debate, to see what we need to do to achieve our vision of a Europe that enjoys the free movement of knowledge. I want to see how far we can go. For example, why not look into a European social security regime for researchers so that they can move effortlessly around Europe? Or why not involve all associated countries not just in the Framework Programme, but also in broader ERA activities like joint programming? I am very keen to have as broad a range of input from as many interested parties as possible and your particular role in getting the message out there is very much appreciated. The consultation should end in August and then at the end of the year we will hold an event with the Portuguese Presidency to examine the issues arising from that debate. Following this, we will look to bring concrete proposals forward early in 2008.

Thank you for your attention.