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Editorial

In this last IRE newsletter of 2005, we take a look at the future of European research and innovation policy. The European Commission's communication 'More research and innovation – investing for growth and employment', featured on page 11, presents plans for research and innovation in European policy-making, funding and business, and for improving policy initiatives through better analysis and collaboration. It confirms the continued role of the IRE platform as a means for bringing together regional and national actors, and providing access to good practice.

Regional actors searching for regional innovation policy good practice can get information about the activities of relevant IRE member regions through the IRE Secretariat's 'Info Point' service, presented on page 6. The Info Point offers tailor-made help to actors interested in what other regions have done in specific areas.

Good practice from IRE regions in the area of promotion of innovation culture were presented at a workshop in Liverpool in October. The article on page 5 gives some of the highlights from the event. Page 7 presents the two first workshops held under the Mutual Learning Platform (MLP) initiative. These focused on regional foresight and regional benchmarking, and initiated the collection of input for the policy-making tools that the MLP will produce.

We also look at the two regions that are pioneering the RIS process in Bulgaria and Turkey. The South Central region was the first in Bulgaria to develop a regional innovation strategy, which is presented on page 3. Mersin started Turkey's first RIS project in June this year. Its current activities are described on page 8, together with those of RIS Zlín in the Czech Republic and the regional innovation policy impact assessment and benchmarking project OMEN.

Finally, the IRE Secretariat wishes all IRE members and other readers of the newsletter a Merry Christmas and a very Happy 2006!

The IRE Secretariat

INDICATIVE CALENDAR OF NETWORK ACTIVITIES

JANUARY 2006

IRE Steering Group meeting, Brussels (BE), 27 January 2006. Contact: Ms Elzbieta Ksiazek, e.ksiazek@innovating-regions.org

FEBRUARY 2006

2nd methodological workshop for 'Regional Innovation Strategy' projects, Malta (MT), 16-17 February 2006. Contact: Ms Nathalie Brahim, n.brahim@innovating-regions.org

Meeting of the IRE subgroup 'Cooperation between business and science', Sofia (BG), 23-24 February 2006. Contact: Mr Clive Winters, c.winters@innovating-regions.org

MARCH 2006

Joint meeting of the IRE subgroup 'Regional clusters as innovation drivers' and the Industrial Regions group, East Lombardy (IT), 9-10 March 2006. Contact: Mr Nils Gabrielsson, n.gabrielsson@innovating-regions.org

Regional innovation strategy

Implementing Bulgaria's first innovation strategy

South Central Bulgaria was the first of the country's regions to develop a Regional Innovation Strategy. The project partners aimed to improve the region's innovation culture and encourage local firms to increase their innovative activities significantly. Their pioneering efforts are now being drawn on by other Bulgarian regions as they begin to draft their own innovation strategies.

South Central Bulgaria developed its Regional Innovation Strategy between 2001 and 2004 through a RIS-NAC project, drawing on support from business groups, the national government, NGOs and the indigenous research community. The European partner regions Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, and Thessaly, Greece, contributed their experiences.

The project's key aim was to develop a common platform on which the public and private sectors, financial institutions, and research and educational bodies could work together to boost the competitiveness of regional SMEs through the enhancement of the regional innovation system.

STRATEGIC AREAS

Developed by stakeholders, the regional innovation strategy is anchored in three strategic priorities. Priority one aims **to improve the competitiveness of regional SMEs through innovation** via a number of operating objectives. These seek to improve the ability of local SMEs to develop and implement innovative activities; promote technology transfer; and develop lasting co-operation between the region's companies.

A variety of tasks have been developed in the strategy to help meet this strategic priority. For example, specialised training will be devised to improve manufacturing and laboratory practices in business sectors of importance to the region. A professional, business-orientated programme for innovation management training will be developed. The region will also work to create and develop links with national and European technology-transfer networks, and seek to develop joint innovation projects in which local firms can work together. Another goal is to support the establishment of regional technology clusters.

INNOVATIVE PEOPLE

Strategic priority two aims to enhance the **innovation culture of the South Central region**. The key goals are to develop human resources for innovation, and raise awareness of the role and importance of innovation. Implementing the innovation strategy should improve the promotion of industrial research and the study of natural and mathematical sciences in schools and universities. On-the-job and vocational training are also priorities, and emphasis is placed on getting businesses involved in providing support for budding specialists through diploma schemes. And the strategy promises to push more technology-oriented subjects on to university curricula. Public-relations activities and various award ceremonies for innovation – to celebrate the work of young innovators or successful business-university partnerships – will be harnessed to give the innovation agenda a higher profile. These activities will be supported by the creation of a regional web portal for innovation, and by running relevant events and exhibitions.

Priority three aims to **further develop and optimise the operation of the Regional Innovation System**. Funding sources for innovation will be reviewed, and the region will explore opportunities for co-financing large-scale projects through public-private partnerships. Commercialising research results could also produce extra revenue for the region's innovation system. Efforts will be made to improve the qualifications of researchers, and to improve organisational structures. This last point will focus on establishing technology-transfer offices in the South Central region's various districts, and these will offer training and project support.

Other activities will focus on strengthening support infrastructures and services for innovation. The innovation strategy aims to encourage networking to promote the exchange of good practice and information among 'intermediary organisations' concerned with innovation. Depending on local demand, the region aims to set up consultancy and information centres such as regional innovation centres, business innovation centres, technology parks, etc. Information about service provision should be supported by the development of databases of information about innovation at industry, regional and national level. Other areas to be covered by strategic priority three include: enhancing the mobility of highly skilled professionals so that they can cross between the research and businesses worlds; promoting the application of high technologies in traditional economic sectors; and establishing spin-off companies that can maximise the commercial value of research.

REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION

The Regional Innovation Strategy and its measures have now been integrated into South Central Bulgaria's Regional Development Plan for 2007-13, and will be harnessing forthcoming EU pre-accession support, and eventually Structural Funds, to produce concrete outcomes for local people. The region is participating in the '5SCHEMES' RIS-NAC support project, which will help it to develop measures in five areas – improving innovation management in companies; stimulation of R&D in the regional economy; provision of innovation consulting services; promoting an innovation culture; and cluster development.

The region will also benefit from the 'Innovation Coach' project, which will provide technical assistance to develop schemes addressing financial aspects of innovation.

NATIONAL IMPACT

As Bulgaria's RIS pioneer, the South Central region is uniquely placed to help the country's other regions to develop their own plans to boost innovation. Indeed every Bulgarian region is now implementing RIS projects and tapping into South Central's experience and expertise. And the region is collaborating with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works and other bodies to establish a national network of Bulgarian RIS regions. This initiative will improve regional coordination with EU and national policies tying together regional development, research and innovation.

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South Central Bulgaria's [innovation strategy](#) can be downloaded from the IRE website.

IRE event



Promotion of a regional innovation culture

The creation and promotion of a regional culture in which innovation becomes an accepted part of daily business life is a topic of increasing importance among European regions. Many are uncertain how to address this issue in an efficient manner, however. The IRE workshop 'Promoting an Innovation Culture in the Regions' presented the successful activities of a number of IRE regions.

Many European regions are becoming aware that poor innovation performance is often caused by the lack of a strong regional innovation culture. Such a culture – in which innovation is not viewed as the specialised activity of a small minority, but where the generation and implementation of new ideas is part of the daily life – is an essential driver of regional innovation. The lack of it is often a real barrier.

The IRE workshop on innovation culture, held in Liverpool on 27-28 October, was organised by the IRE Secretariat in collaboration with Northwest Development Agency. It responded to the needs of regions that have included this topic in their innovation strategies but are unsure what actions to implement. It included examples in three areas – promoting an innovation culture in SMEs, creating an innovative environment, and stimulating the entrepreneurship spirit.

INDUSTRIAL DECLINE GIVES BIRTH TO NEW CULTURE

In the 1970s, drastic reduction of the steel, coal and copper industries in England's Northwest, the workshop's host region, led to economic decline and rising unemployment. To address these problems, Manchester University established its first incubator to encourage science-based entrepreneurship. Results were good, but it also became clear that too much time had to be spent on basic training for entrepreneurs with high scientific skills but little knowledge about the business world. The region's expanding incubator network has therefore been complemented by the 'Master of Enterprise Programme', a full-time one-year university course, and the 'Business Formation' support programme and premises, which help entrepreneurs refine their business ideas and prepare for the incubation period.

Germany's Saarland region faced similar problems when its steel and iron industries declined in the 1980s. To help turn around the situation, the University of Saarland set up a 'Start-Up Centre' which provides training for future entrepreneurs, short intensive courses on business management and company creation, and individual coaching. After ten years of activity, a culture of entrepreneurship and self-employment is spreading across the university.

USING CREATIVE ABILITIES

While many of the speakers presented initiatives addressing university students, Western Sweden highlighted 'Flashes of Genius' – an initiative encouraging 6-11 year-olds to identify everyday problems and invent innovative solutions illustrated by drawings. Building on children's natural curiosity and creativity, Flashes of Genius gives them confidence not just to accept the way things are but to explore new and better ideas.

Western Scotland was one of the first IRE regions that gave innovation culture a place in its regional innovation strategy. Taking as its starting point the belief that even small, traditional companies have the capacity to innovate, the region launched five pilot projects aiming to change companies' attitudes and behaviour. The participating companies learnt to use tools to unlock the creativity of their staff, thereby boosting their business opportunities and success.

[Presentations and minutes](#) from the workshop are available on the IRE website. Further information can also be provided by Lena Mårtensson, phone +352 441012 2088, e-mail l.martensson@innovating-regions.org.

IRE services



Easy access to IRE experience – the IRE Info Point

Successful experiences and good practice from other regions provide inspiration and a useful reference framework for those developing new innovation activities. Through the IRE Info Point, the IRE Secretariat offers tailor-made information about relevant experiences in response to individual requests.

Over the past ten years, IRE member regions have generated a wealth of experience on regional innovation schemes and activities. IRE regions planning to launch new innovation actions can get inspiration and valuable ideas from looking at what other regions have already done. The IRE Info Point service is designed to provide information on relevant good examples corresponding closely to the needs of the requesting region.

An Info Point consists of a document, specially prepared by the team of IRE Secretariat experts, containing brief, straightforward information about selected regional examples related to the topic of interest. Each example includes a regional contact person who can provide further information. In this way, the Info Point can also be a door-opener for further networking and collaboration.

TOPICS OF INTEREST

The Info Point service can provide information on any topic covered by the activities of the IRE regions within the framework of their regional innovation strategies. The most frequently requested topics include:

- Innovative clusters
- RIS projects and the IRE network
- Regional foresight
- Innovation financing
- Innovation promotion in the food and tourism sectors

USE BY IRE REGIONS

The Info Point service is used in various contexts. Slovenia, for example, repeatedly used the Info Point during the preparation of its regional innovation strategy, and asked for information on topics such as university-industry collaboration, fiscal incentives to encourage innovation, and RIS follow-up indicators and monitoring. The Info Point is also frequently used by regions finalising concrete innovation schemes – the RIS-NAC regions currently preparing to implement the innovation strategies that they completed last year, for example. Polish Wielkopolska, whose priority is activities to boost interactions between research institutes and regional companies, used the Info Point to identify good practice in this area.

On-going RIS projects also take advantage of the Info Point to learn about specific RIS methodology. RIS Mersin got information on the main issues to take into account when launching a RIS project; RIS Western Switzerland on the composition and leadership of the RIS Steering Committee; and the Hungarian/Slovakian NORRIS project on other transnational RIS projects. The Spanish region of Catalonia used the Info Point to get background information on regional innovation schemes in Scandinavia, which was followed by a study visit to two Swedish regions.

The Info Point is available for all actors involved in the promotion of regional innovation and, like all IRE Secretariat services, is free of charge. Anyone wishing to take advantage of the Info Point is welcome to submit a request through the [IRE website](#) or contact Augusto Ferreira, phone +352 441012 2352, e-mail a.ferreira@innovating-region.org. An IRE expert will get back to you to discuss your needs in detail before compiling the relevant information.

Mutual Learning Platform**MLP workshops on foresight and benchmarking**

Regional foresight and regional benchmarking were the themes of the first two workshops organised as a part of the Mutual Learning Platform. The first presented foresight experiences and explored requirements for successful foresight work. The second looked at how benchmarking can contribute to better regional policy making.

The [Mutual Learning Platform \(MLP\)](#) was launched in the beginning of 2005 as part of the effort to increase European R&D spending to 3% of European GDP. Its aim is to enable European regions to enter the knowledge-based society and benefit from increased investment in research and innovation. Led by the European Commission's Enterprise and Industry DG in collaboration with Research DG, Regional Policy DG and the Committee of the Regions, the MLP focuses on three main themes – regional foresight, regional benchmarking, and regional profiles in research and innovation. Two workshops will be organised for each theme. The first two, which took place this autumn, tackled foresight and benchmarking.

BENEFITS AND IMPACTS OF FORESIGHT

The foresight workshop, 'Benefits and impacts of foresight – mutual learning based on regional experiences', presented regional foresight exercises initiated through Research DG's [Blueprints on Foresight Actions](#) expert group in German Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Hungarian South Great Plain, as well as [FOR-LEARN](#), an initiative to consolidate European foresight expertise and raise the quality of foresight practice.

The main benefits highlighted were that foresight exercises stimulate active participation in strategic discussions about the region's long-term future. Several regions have also found them useful in helping to build commitment to shared goals among key regional stakeholders. South Great Plain pointed out that its foresight exercise contributed to more rational planning processes and policies in the region. Foresight normally has a broader focus and a much longer time horizon than a RIS project, but the two approaches can be complementary, and some regions have in fact found both useful.

The workshop concluded that, for a foresight exercise to be successful, there must be clear understanding of its purpose, and clear demand for its results, within the region. To generate interest, foresight should be presented as a forum, inspiring new practical solutions and approaches to a problem. All relevant stakeholders should be encouraged to participate, and the work should be action-oriented.

The [presentations](#) from the workshop are available on the IRE website.

IMPROVING REGIONAL POLICY-MAKING THROUGH BENCHMARKING

The aim of benchmarking is to analyse the impact of policies on regional innovation systems, and to enhance the policies themselves. At the same time, benchmarking can be used to raise regional stakeholders' awareness of their region's relative position and improve their understanding of its weaknesses and strengths. The reason for undertaking benchmarking, as well as the focus and methodology used, depend on the context of the exercise. The differences between regions make it difficult to apply the same approach or method everywhere.

These issues were discussed at the MLP workshop 'Benchmarking for better regional innovation policies', which aimed to stimulate the use of benchmarking as a way of improving regional innovation policy making. The workshop built on regional good practice and on European activities such as the Innovation Trendchart. The eight regional innovation policy impact assessment and benchmarking projects launched within the IRE network were invited to take part in the discussions.

The participants perceived the definition of the scope of the benchmarking exercise as the most critical issue. The benchmarking exercise can have a generic character and address the regional innovation system. On the other hand, participants presented examples of benchmarking exercises with a more precisely defined scope, focusing for instance on a specific sector, theme or type of institution.

The workshop's general conclusion was that benchmarking is not a simple matter of ranking based on a set of indicators, but an analytical and policy tool which focuses on processes and interrelations between different factors. It can be seen as an impact assessment or an evaluation tool which enhances the policy learning and policy-making process.

The [presentations](#) from the workshop can be downloaded from the IRE website.

THE NEXT STEPS

A third MLP workshop with the title 'Regional profiles and growth poles' took place on 9 December, followed a few days later by a meeting of the MLP Board to outline the activities of the MLP during the first half of 2006. Further information about these meetings and subsequent activities will be given in the next issue of the IRE newsletter.

IRE project update



IRE projects raising interest in innovation

RIS Zlín, currently the only RIS project in the Czech Republic, and RIS Mersin, Turkey's first RIS project, are both working to interest people in their regions in innovation generally – and the development of a regional innovation strategy in particular. The impact assessment and benchmarking project OMEN is in parallel securing commitment from its partner regions by establishing regional round tables for innovation actors.

RIS MERSIN – INTRODUCING REGIONAL INNOVATION IN TURKEY

RIS [Mersin](#) is Turkey's first RIS project. It is coordinated by METU-Technopolis in collaboration with Mersin University, Mersin Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mersin-Tarsus Organised Industrial Zone and a Greek partner region, Epirus. Its aim is to increase the region's innovation potential by:

- promoting a regional innovation infrastructure
- creating a regional culture open to innovation and creativity
- encouraging university-industry collaboration in order to transform research results into commercial innovation
- increasing the number of innovative SMEs

The project's objectives also include creating a common platform for universities, research centres and private and public sectors, and promoting inter-sectoral and inter-regional collaboration opportunities.

Regional innovation is a new concept in Turkey, whose policy-making has traditionally been central rather than regional. To raise awareness about the project and create a general interest in innovation, RIS Mersin has carried out an extensive promotional campaign, including advertisements, newspaper articles and a programme on regional TV. A major promotional event, the First Regional Innovation Forum, was organised in mid-November to highlight the benefits from innovation promotion to a large regional and national audience. Speaking at the forum, the Mayor of Mersin and the Turkish Minister of Industry and Trade both underlined the

importance of RIS Mersin as Turkey's first innovation project, and an inspiration for other Turkish regions.

RIS ZLÍN – BOOSTING REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The [Zlín Self-governing Region](#) was established only in 2001. It has a long industrial tradition, but recent decades have seen a decline in its fortunes, slowing regional development. Today, Zlín is one of the Czech Republic's least developed regions, but retains considerable industrial potential.

The Regional Authority of Zlín, responsible for regional development, is searching for tools to stimulate entrepreneurship and economic growth, and considers innovation support a priority. Together with the new, dynamic Tomas Bata University – established in 2000 – and other local partners, the Authority has launched RIS Zlín with the overall aim of boosting regional competitiveness and entrepreneurial activity. Its specific objectives include promoting favourable conditions for inter-regional cooperation and transfer of innovation know-how from abroad, and connecting regional companies with R&D capacities outside the region. The project should also contribute to stimulating the innovation activities of regional firms, and to increasing the proportion of jobs in Zlín that require tertiary education. RIS Zlín's European partner regions are Castilla y León in Spain and Piemonte in Italy.

The project is currently in its establishment phase, focusing on awareness-raising about the development of a regional innovation strategy and securing the active participation of players in the regional innovation process. A recent conference presented RIS Zlín's objectives and the need for an innovation strategy. It will be followed during the coming months by workshops with representatives of regional companies to gain their involvement in the project.

OMEN – REGIONAL ROUND TABLES FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The regional innovation policy impact assessment and benchmarking project [OMEN](#) was officially launched in June 2005. The project addresses the lack of effective and verifiable methodologies and tools to assess the impact of regional research and innovation policy – in particular, impacts on the business community. By using the experiences of the six member regions – Lazio (IT), Andalusia (ES), Cyprus (CY), Podkarpackie (PL) and Saxony-Anhalt (DE) – the project aims to develop a methodological instrument for reliable assessment of the achievements of regional innovation strategies and policies, in order to provide policy-makers with feedback and recommendations.

Participating regions will integrate the tool developed by OMEN into their mainstream policy-making processes. OMEN will prepare a 'white paper' summarising the status of innovation policy in the partner regions and produce concrete innovation policy recommendations. The project will also create new qualitative and quantitative benchmarking indicators.

Each partner region has set up a Regional Round Table consisting of innovation policy *drivers* (regional development agencies), *makers* (regional governments) and *users* (enterprises, industrial associations, universities, research centres, science parks, etc). The Round Tables will facilitate the exchange of ideas and the analysis of needs for impact assessment and benchmarking among key regional innovation actors. Each has already met for the first time, and will meet at least once during each of OMEN's four project phases.

All five regions used a standard questionnaire as a starting point for the analysis of needs. Surveys of participating stakeholders will provide a better understanding of which issues are considered priorities, an overview of the most common statistical indicators, and the first concrete suggestions for new benchmarking parameters. An analysis of the data will be presented at OMEN's first official Dissemination and Awareness-Raising Event in January 2006.

Further information about the [RIS](#) and [impact assessment and benchmarking projects](#) is available at the IRE website.

Event report



PAXIS European Innovation Workshop

PAXIS – a pilot action focusing on regional approaches to innovative start-ups, and a sister initiative of the Innovating Regions in Europe – is coming to an end. A workshop in Edinburgh (UK), on 6-7 October, was the occasion to summarise the experience of the PAXIS networks and look to the future. Their activities will continue in the broader framework of the future PRO INNO initiative under FP6 – and after that under the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme.

PAXIS – the Pilot Action of Excellence on Innovative Start-ups – was initiated by the European Commission in 1999 as a platform for the exchange of policy best practice in support of the creation and growth of innovative firms. The concept of Regions of Excellence was established to showcase the best-performing European regions – those with an outstanding track record in this area as well as excellent general economic and innovation performance. The 22 regions embraced within the PAXIS family of excellence have worked together in thematic networks. PAXIS also developed projects on specific issues designed for transfer to New Member States, a model for start-up support for other European regions, and wider awareness and policy-making actions.

RECAPITALISING RESULTS

For the projects, the event was the final step in the continuous peer review process in which they have participated from the start. They presented their results in the plenary session and had individual evaluation meetings in parallel sessions in where their work was reviewed by external experts as well as colleagues from other projects. All were able to demonstrate the benefits of networking for the transfer of specific schemes and for policy learning on different aspects of encouraging and supporting innovative entrepreneurship.

The most popular themes were the organisation of successful incubators, entrepreneurship training, and financing schemes. Concrete examples were given of measures introduced and of companies created with the support of the new schemes.

The initiative's 'elite' approach was among the issues debated. In contrast with the egalitarian approach of the Innovating Regions in Europe, the PAXIS regions have generally been among Europe's wealthiest. Workshop participants agreed that this is simply a different approach, from which less favoured regions also benefit. In line with the network's motto that "excellence can be learned", there was widespread agreement that the transfer of excellent practice is beneficial for everybody.

The event also reviewed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the action as a whole with respect to its four principal areas of activity – learning, networking, mobilising and innovating. The networks' assets are strong knowledge sharing, excellent people and ideas, and a wealth of good practice. Despite limited impact in terms of members involved, time and resources, there are opportunities to build on the pilot results through extended partnerships.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The event was also an occasion to plans for the future. Though the pilot action is coming to an end, its work will be further developed in the [PRO INNO](#) action. This will not simply continue PAXIS, but will open its work to all interested parties for networking and joint actions undertaken by consortia of national and regional programme managers in all fields of innovation policy. In addition, a PRO INNO learning platform will be established as an open forum for regions and national agencies to transfer good practices and prepare future collaborations. It is planned to connect the platform with IRE.

Information about PAXIS action as well as the presentations of the conference is available at: <http://www.cordis.lu/paxis>

Review



A common approach to research and innovation

On 12 October, the Commission adopted a communication setting out its new 'Common approach to research and innovation'. An integral part of the implementation of the revised Lisbon strategy, the actions within the strategy present, for the first time, an integrated framework for the promotion of research and innovation in Europe.

In launching the new 'Lisbon partnership for growth and jobs' in March 2005, the European Council singled out increased support for research and innovation as one of three main areas where action was needed to stimulate economic growth and employment. Building on the Lisbon approach, the common strategy provides a more integrated framework for the wide range of initiatives supported by the EU in these two areas.

It is now widely accepted that if Europe is to protect its present social model and quality of life, it must refocus on more knowledge-based areas of the economy where it can maintain a competitive lead. Investing in research – and then ensuring that the knowledge generated is transferred into new, improved products, processes and services through innovation – will be crucial to maintaining Europe's economic position in global markets.

STAYING ON THE MAP – THE KEY ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

International competition is increasing, and to address the challenge the Commission wants to develop an integrated policy framework for supporting and stimulating research and innovation. One area singled out for special attention is the need to improve conditions for **private-sector investment** in R&D and innovation. The 2002 Barcelona Council set the goal of raising research investment in the EU from 1.9% of GDP to 3% by 2010. And, most importantly, the private sector should increase its share of overall research funding from just over half to two-thirds.

Although Europe has made some progress towards increasing R&D spending, the latest figures show that EU R&D intensity (investment as a proportion of GDP) is hardly growing while growth in R&D spending itself has actually slowed since 2000. Stimulating greater commitment to research and innovation (R&I), especially in private sector, is seen as a key factor in improving this trend. The EU will, therefore, be looking closely at the conditions influencing business investment in R&D and how these can be improved in Europe.

CAPITALISING ON SYNERGIES

The common strategy has four main pillars – R&I in European policies; R&I in EU funding; R&I in business; and improving policy initiatives through better analysis, mutual learning and co-operation. It includes nineteen specific actions, which address a wide range of areas affecting research, innovation, and the relationship between the two. Some build on previous EU activities, but many are new initiatives.

Actions proposed include, for example, a wide-ranging consultation to identify and remove persistent regulatory barriers to innovation; better incentives to encourage researcher mobility; improved intellectual-property protection; and a concerted effort to stimulate greater co-operation at all levels – university/industry collaboration, transnational research programmes, and exchanges of experience and best practice between regions and innovation agencies. More emphasis will also be placed on the analysis of policy and its impacts in order to support more effective benchmarking and mutual learning.

With regard to funding, the Commission will be looking at ways to encourage wide-scale mobilisation of funds for research and innovation at various levels – in particular, in the context of state aid, the Structural Funds, public procurement and the National Reform Programmes

(NRP) being drawn up by Member States, in line with the Commission's Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs. In the words of the Communication, "higher priority should be given to research and innovation in allocating public expenditure at all levels." The Commission will also be looking at novel ways to provide pro-active business support and greater access to capital for innovating companies.

A ROLE FOR THE REGIONS

The regions will continue to be key players in the future Research and Innovation Plan, with existing measures to support regional innovation – including the Innovating Regions in Europe – being reinforced.

Several new initiatives will be introduced, offering further opportunities for transnational collaboration and mutual learning. [PRO INNO](#) will build on the experiences of the IRE platform to extend support for transnational collaboration and the exchange of good practice between regional and national innovation programme managers, for example. A call for this action has already been published with a deadline of 5 January 2006. The initiative will include a learning platform to identify and further assess good practice, the creation of **INNO-Nets** to bring together regional/national innovation programme managers, and support to specific transnational innovation initiatives and public-private partnerships through **INNO-Actions**. The [Europe INNOVA](#) initiative will have a more sectoral focus, bringing together networks of industrial clusters to analyse innovation performance and identify key drivers and challenges.

Finally, under FP7 increased resources are proposed for continuing the Community's 'Regions of Knowledge' initiative, which supports the definition and implementation of policies for the development of research-driven clusters. Regions of Knowledge will support transnational mutual learning and co-operation between research-driven clusters, bringing together regional authorities and development agencies, public research organisations, industry and other relevant stakeholders. The main activities covered will be:

- Analysis, development and implementation of research agendas for regional clusters and co-operation between them
- 'Mentoring' of regions with a less developed research profile by highly developed ones
- Actions to improve the integration of research actors and institutions in regional economies

For further information, download the communication at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/innovation/index_en.htm

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