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Science-friendly standards

A couple of years ago politicians all over Europe were speaking about rebalancing EU expenses for the benefit of research and innovation in order to, finally, concretise the Lisbon strategy and give Europe a future. Since then, however, several EU member states under the leadership of France and Germany have endeavoured to reform the Common Agricultural Policy with the aim of safeguarding agricultural expenses. Moreover, dreams of an increased EU budget based on new, possibly own, resources are fading away in the midst of the financial and economical crises that have hit the world and rocked public finances.

Against this background, Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn will face a tough battle fighting for a bigger share of the new financial perspectives – the EU budget for the period 2014 to 2020. A second major challenge will be proposing a new Framework Programme (FP8, to start in 2014) striking a good balance between industrial and frontier research and favouring key pillars of the European Research Area such as mobility, international cooperation, research infrastructures and the European Research Council.

However, for both industry and academic researchers, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn is expected to make a visible difference through the simplification of the Framework Programme procedures and, most importantly, the (in)famous financial regulations, thereby making European research funding much more science ‘friendly’. Whilst maintaining high accountability standards, it is crucial to recognise the specificities of the research process – which are very different from commercial activities – to provide the necessary flexibility and reduced red tape, for instance, by issuing lump-sum grants instead of contracts whenever possible.

If the above form part of the new Commissioner’s ambitions, she should then, in all likelihood, be able to count on the whole scientific community to ‘lend a hand’.



Dr Luc van Dyck
Secretary

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