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Spain Takes Over Presidency of EU Council

Spain has pledged to drive forward the realisation of the European Research Area (ERA) during its six-month Presidency of the Council of the EU, which started on January 1st. Innovation and equality are at the heart of the Spanish Presidency programme, explained Science and Innovation Minister Cristina Garmendia who added, "Promoting the construction of the ERA is key to the success of this programme. It is only by having a common shared space for knowledge, the ERA, in which scientists and ideas can move freely, that research and innovation will be able to act as engines for economic and social progress over the coming decades. For this reason, they should be at the heart of European Union policies".

Spain has identified three "axes" to drive the ERA forward: integration, involvement and inclusion. The integration axis refers to the importance of integrating research and development (R&D) policies into other policies - and specifically into the EU's strategy for 2020. Through the involvement axis, Spain will seek to ensure that all instruments supporting R&D and innovation in Europe, whether they are regional, national or pan-European in nature, address the major challenges faced by society today. These include climate change, the search for new sources of energy, ageing and disease, and globalisation. Finally, the inclusion axis focuses on the role science and innovation can play in promoting social cohesion and tackling poverty and exclusion.

Writing on CORDIS, the Spanish Presidency explains "Europe has the duty and the opportunity to lead the battle against inequality and to put science and technology to use in this fight." Looked at more broadly, Spain's priorities for the next six months include: consolidating Europe's social agenda, paying special attention to gender equality and the fight against domestic violence; getting out of the economic crisis; energy security and climate change; creating a safer EU, particularly with regard to the challenge of immigration; and enabling Europe to speak with its own voice on the international scene. Spain will head up the EU Council for the first half of 2010, before handing over the reins to Belgium on July 1st.

Together with Hungary, which will hold the Presidency in the first half of 2011, Spain and Belgium have put together an 18-month work programme. In it, they promise to "take full account of the importance of research and development and innovation in the renewal of the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy". In addition to the creation and governance of the ERA, priorities identified by the trio include the analysis of the mid-term review of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) and the implementation of joint programming. In particular, the Presidencies are keen to emphasise the importance of the regional dimension of innovation and research policies. They also highlight the importance of making research careers more attractive and attracting the world's best brains to Europe.

The three nations pledge to closely follow the creation of the first knowledge and innovation communities (KICs) under the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). Finally, they say they will "closely monitor" progress on the development of the pan-European research infrastructures identified by the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI).

For more information, visit: www.eu2010.es www.cordis.europa.eu/spain/presidency2010/home_en.html

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