

Brussels, 29 November 2007

Enthusiasm for new networking tool among European researchers in Japan

European researchers in Japan have given a resounding "yes" to the European Commission's proposed initiative to create a network of European researchers in Japan called ERA-Link/Japan. This network will provide them with information and services about career and research-funding opportunities in Europe, as well as openings for research collaboration. A survey of over 500 European researchers working in Japan has shown that the majority have been there for less than five years and that only 10% have no knowledge of Japanese. The results of the survey will be presented at events in Tokyo on 29 November and Brussels on 7 December.

"European researchers working in Japan represent a patrimony of knowledge and experience," said European Science and Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik. They represent a potential for Europe-Japan cooperation on which Europe could capitalise more effectively than it does today. European researchers in Japan are a potential asset, not a loss, for Europe. The proposed ERA-Link/Japan will keep European researchers in Japan in touch with each other, informed about European research, and able to inform researchers in Europe about research in Japan, all of which will be instrumental in reinforcing Europe-Japan research cooperation. Rather than "brain gain" or "brain drain", it is brain circulation between the EU and Japan that will forge an effective human capital partnership."

Networking European Researchers Abroad (ERA) was first launched in 2005 for European researchers in the USA (ERA-Link/USA). Since then, it has provided an electronic tool for the easy access of information about research careers, exchanges and funding. The European Commission is now looking into making ERA-Link a global network with specific branches in other countries and regions of the world.

In order to better understand the views and needs of European researchers in Japan, the European Commission, in collaboration with the Embassies of the EU Member States in Japan and the other European countries associated with the European Research Area, launched a broad survey among European researchers currently working there.

571 researchers responded to the survey, including researchers coming from all-over Europe who are working in various Japanese cities. 65% of respondents worked outside Tokyo and the majority (67%) had spent less than 5 years in Japan. Notably, only 10% of the respondents had no knowledge of the Japanese language with 63% having either basic or conversational level of Japanese.

Respondents were very keen to develop their contact network, and were interested in information on career development and research funding. Specifically, the most valuable types of information and services cited were Europe-Japan cooperation opportunities, research funding sources, information on careers in Europe and tools for developing contacts with other researchers and scientific organisations.

While interest in the proposed benefits of ERA-Link was very high (74% judged it as useful or very useful), respondents knew little about European research programmes and policies such as the EU's 7th Research Framework Programme or the European Research Area (ERA). This provided more evidence for the need to launch an ERA-Link/Japan in the near future.

The European Commission, in collaboration with the EU Member States, is now preparing the next phase of the ERA-Link/Japan project, that is, design and technical specifications. The network is expected to be operational by mid-2008.

The full report of the survey results can be found on-line at:

<http://www.deljpn.ec.europa.eu/ERA-Link>