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"We are more intelligent together": EU citizens value science and call for more cooperation at European level

According to a new qualitative study published today regarding the image of science and the perceptions and attitudes on the European research policy of the EU citizens, science is highly valued and intimately linked to the idea of progress. However, science also gives rise to some fears and reservations – mostly of possible misuse by mankind. The study also reveals support for a more coordinated European research policy and the need to pool human and financial resources to do research on issues of common interest such health, environment or energy. These comments come from group discussions that were carried out in the 27 European Union member states during summer 2008 and which included men and women aged 17 to 60 years, drawn from a mix of social groups.

"These results are particularly encouraging: they prove science matters to people and that the Commission's objective to build the European Research Area is going in the good direction" says European Science and Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik. "European citizens believe in science as a tool of progress and support a more cooperative European approach to science and technology policy. Pooling brains and resources is key to make the EU competitive globally: we are more intelligent together than on our own!"

The study shows that the predominant hopes and fears are concentrated on subjects that are perceived as concretely affecting peoples' daily lives or likely to affect them. Participants in this study gave their views on a number of potentially controversial areas of science, such as experiments on animals, work with stem cells and biofuels. People are generally positive about the developments in the medico-pharmaceutical field, research into solutions to energy, environment and climate problems, and the invention or improvement of products that make life easier. Concerns are more likely to be voiced about the risks of genetic manipulation, GMOs, other issues related to health, preoccupations linked to the environment, and the use of science for destructive purposes such as nuclear and chemical armaments.

The overall impression of EU citizens is that scientific research is weak and insufficient in their own country. The reasons behind this are thought to be: low research budgets, absence of political vision and will, poor organisation of public research, and low interest in research careers, given the conditions for researchers in European countries, which leads to a brain drain. This impression is particularly strong in Eastern and Southern member states, with more confidence being shown by three of the larger member states, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. However, EU citizens are convinced that the development of research is essential for their countries, and agree with the idea that "more should be done".

European research policy is not widely known about although the principle was very positively accepted by most. The most enthusiastic were the French, Italian, Belgian, Slovene and Slovakian interviewees, as well as the Irish, Portuguese, Greeks, Hungarians and Romanian. An almost complete consensus prevails in favour of the principle of European action in scientific research, and in favour of its being strengthened. Explicitly or implicitly, what is at stake is Europe's capacity to invent and innovate, compared to its great international competitors, such as the United States and Japan. The principle of cooperation is well received because it favours the exchange and mixing of ideas and experiences. Interviewees also appreciated the emphasis on improving researcher's conditions to encourage them to stay in their country rather than contributing to "the brain drain".

For more information about this study:

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.topic&id=1220>

See also [IP/08/1711](#) and [MEMO/08/711](#)