

“Europe sees its future as striking a balance between competition and cooperation, collectively trying to steer the destiny of the men and women who live in it. Is this easily done? No ...” (Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, 1989)

Since the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 the (now) European Union has been, in a number of respects, a unique experiment in the dialectic of cooperation and competition. While the overall concept of the Union is founded on the principles of cooperation between its member countries, the mutual benefits of the latter are conditional upon principles of fair competition.

Along with the European internal market, the common currency and enlargement, the Lisbon Strategy, adopted in 2000 has become one of the main aims of the European Union. The drive towards a knowledge based society in Europe has placed research, higher education and innovation – the so called ‘knowledge triangle’ – at the centre of European as well as of national policy making. The rapidly growing importance of the “European level” across these policy fields is illustrated by the following examples:

- The newly signed Lisbon Treaty is the first European treaty in which research is specifically mentioned as an EU objective; previously, research was included as a means to promote European competitiveness.
- While higher education policies in Europe are primarily the responsibility of Member States and of regional and local authorities, the Bologna process is clearly increasing cooperation and competition between universities in Europe.

- With more than 40% of its budget now being devoted to research and innovation, the EU Structural Funds are also of ever growing importance to research cooperation and competition in Europe.

These “intra-European” developments are accompanied by significant trends in the internationalization of research; increasing researcher mobility and the competition for talent – both within Europe as well as on an increasingly global scale -; the growing importance of science in international relations; as well as global challenges concerning climate change, energy and food security – these are just some examples of the rapidly changing global landscape of science and of higher education.

The growing importance and role of EU level policies and programmes in science and in higher education, in synergy with those at the national and regional levels, provide major challenges for attempts to ensure appropriate “mixes” between cooperation and competition. These challenges will be an important feature in the upcoming decisions on the EU Financial Perspectives for 2014 - 2020, including the strategic orientations and structure of the next (8th) EU R&D Framework Programme.

With the backdrop of the recent economic crisis the situation is particularly complex and surrounded by uncertainty. At the same time, the stakes are very high for the EU and for its current (and possible future) Member States.

This presentation will attempt to highlight and consider those policy areas, tools and programmes which are likely to carry particularly important implications for the interplay between research competition and cooperation within a European perspective.